


Preventing ACEs Through Collaboration and Economic Supports (PACES)

**Year 3 Final
Evaluation Report**

September 2023



The University of Texas at Austin
Texas Institute for
Child & Family Wellbeing
Steve Hicks School of Social Work





Preventing ACEs Through Collaboration and Economic Supports (PACES):

Year 3 Final Evaluation Report

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Prepared for Foundation Communities by:

Laura Marra, MSSW

Kaitlyn Doerge, MSSW


Beth Gerlach, PhD, LCSW

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Executive Summary

Background and Overview

Poverty and economic hardship can compound stressors that put children at risk of experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which can have long-term implications for children’s health and wellbeing. Foundation Communities created the Preventing ACEs Through Collaboration and Economic Supports (PACES) project to reduce financial strain and promote protective factors against ACEs for families by increasing the receipt of federal tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). The PACES project aimed to support low-income parents, particularly parents of color with young children who live within Austin’s Eastern Crescent, an area with a high concentration of families experiencing poverty. This was done by training staff who work with low-income families at local organizations and through outreach and free tax filing assistance for families. Foundation Communities, in partnership with United Way for Greater Austin, has contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) at The University of Texas at Austin to evaluate the PACES project.

Key Findings

STAFF SURVEYS

- The ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training significantly increased staff’s understanding of trauma, their ability to identify protective factors and promote resilience with families, and their knowledge and awareness of free tax preparation services.
- After completing the training, staff were more confident and more likely to share information about tax credits and tax preparation services. Staff were also more likely to refer clients to Foundation Communities’ free tax preparation services.
- On the survey, staff recommended that Foundation Communities provide staff with recruitment materials for clients well in advance of tax season. Staff also requested that information on unique filing situations be shared.

FAMILY SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

- A little over half of Year 3 survey participants claimed federal tax credits on their 2022 taxes. Survey participants who identified as White were more likely to claim federal tax credits compared to participants who identified as Black or Latino/a/x.
- Of survey participants that filed taxes, about one fourth filed through Foundation Communities, one third used an e-filing service, and over one third paid a professional to do their taxes. Interviewees who used Foundation Communities to file their taxes

reported high levels of satisfaction and said they would use these services again in the future.

- Economic hardship, housing instability, job stress, and childcare were common struggles among families who participated in the survey. However, participants who claimed the EITC reported significantly lower levels of hardship compared to non-filers. In terms of protective factors, EITC claimers reported significantly higher levels of family functioning and support compared to non-filers.
- Interviewees who claimed federal tax credits said these credits were beneficial in helping them manage overall expenses, reduce debt, and build savings.
- There were no significant changes over time in tax filing or tax credit claiming for participants in the Austin Families sample who completed all three annual surveys. However, most survey participants indicated they were not involved with an organization where at least one staff member participated in the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the training at this time.

Recommendations

- Implement alternative outreach strategies for families to increase the use of free tax preparation services, including advertising in other low-income apartments beyond Foundation Communities properties, as well as other locations such as grocery stores, schools, and churches that families may visit frequently.
- Expand outreach strategies and trainings to staff at organizations where families are more involved to help determine the effectiveness of the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training on tax filing and tax credit claiming among low-income families in Austin's Eastern Crescent.
- Align outreach to staff with geographic location of tax centers to ensure that staff are reaching clients who would most likely be able to utilize these services.
- Provide timely recruitment materials for staff to reach clients before they decide to go elsewhere. Ensure materials include detailed information staff could share with families about tax filing, federal tax credit eligibility, and Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services.



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Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events or experiences that can negatively impact a child’s long-term health, wellbeing, and socioeconomic outcomes.^{iii,iv} ACEs can include abuse, neglect, experiencing or witnessing violence, and other factors that undermine a child’s safety and stability.^v Poverty and economic hardship can compound these stressors and put children at greater risk for negative outcomes.^{vi} Children living in poverty often experience ACEs at a greater frequency than their counterparts.^{vii} According to the Travis County Poverty Brief, 1 in 4 Travis County residents live below 200% of the federal poverty level and large areas of Eastern Travis County have 25–50% of residents living below 200% of the federal poverty level.^{viii} Additionally, Travis County residents who identify as Black or Latino/a/x experience poverty at a higher rate than White, non-Hispanic residents.^{ix} Lastly, in Travis County, children under the age of 18 and young adults ages 18-24 also experience higher than average poverty rates.^x

For families, strengthening economic supports may prevent or mitigate the impact of ACEs.^{xi} Federal tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) provide additional income that improves household financial security and reduces poverty for families.^{xii} The Preventing ACEs Through Collaboration and Economic Supports (PACES) project aims to ease environmental and economic conditions that place families and children at risk for experiencing ACEs by increasing receipt of the EITC and CTC among eligible families through support with free tax filing.

Eligible beneficiaries of anti-poverty tools such as the EITC and CTC must first file their taxes and then claim the credit on their tax return. Given that 1 in 5 tax filers who qualify for the EITC do not claim the tax credit, and approximately 1 in 4 EITC-eligible workers do not file a tax return, many opportunities exist to increase tax filing and credit claiming among families.^{xiii,xiv}

PACES Project Overview

Foundation Communities created the PACES project to reduce financial strain and promote protective factors against ACEs for families by increasing the receipt of federal tax credits such as the EITC and CTC. The PACES project aims to support low-income parents—particularly parents of color with young children—who live within Austin’s Eastern Crescent.

Through the PACES project, Foundation Communities aimed to reach EITC- and CTC-eligible families in the Eastern Crescent community and promote tax filing and credit claiming. To directly reach families, Foundation Communities used social media, paid online advertising campaigns, earned media such as television interviews, tabling at community events, text messaging platforms, and highly visible public messaging (e.g., city bus ads or over-the-street banners) in the Eastern Crescent to encourage families to file. To indirectly reach Eastern Crescent families, Foundation Communities partnered with numerous organizations to have their frontline staff encourage clients to file. To prepare frontline professionals for their role in Foundation Communities’ outreach efforts, partner organizations’ staff received customized training on the fundamentals of ACEs (e.g., definitions, signs, symptoms, and traumatic events), general risk and protective factors of ACEs, and information on improving families’ financial

status through receipt of the EITC and CTC. By increasing knowledge about ACEs and federal tax credits, Foundation Communities endeavors to help frontline staff inform their clients of the importance of tax filing and claiming federal tax credits. The training ultimately encourages staff to refer their clients to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services.

Evaluation Overview

Foundation Communities, in partnership with United Way for Greater Austin, contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) at The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work to evaluate the second and third years of the PACES project. The first year of the evaluation was completed by the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, in partnership with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University.

As part of this evaluation, TXICFW examined whether the PACES project's direct and indirect outreach efforts are associated with an increase in the number of clients who file their taxes and receive federal tax credits. The research team conducted this examination by assessing changes in tax filing behavior over three years using a convenience sample of Eastern Crescent families identified in the first year of the study (Austin Families sample). The evaluation also assessed the extent to which receipt of these federal tax credits is associated with a decrease in risk factors for ACEs and an increase in factors that protect against ACEs.

Over the evaluation period, TXICFW addressed the following research aims: (1) assess the effectiveness of staff training; (2) assess the effectiveness of participant outreach; and (3) identify the components of the PACES project that enhanced or detracted from the success of the project.

The data sources designed and administered by the Policy Impact Center included three surveys: The Austin Families Year 1 Survey (previously referred to as the PACES Client Survey) and the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training Pre- and Post-Surveys (previously referred to as the Community Partner's Staff Surveys). The ACEs and Mitigating Factors Pre-Survey was administered to frontline staff in Fall 2021 prior to their participation in the training, and the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Post-Survey was administered to staff directly after this training. The Austin Families Year 1 Survey was administered to eligible families from 12 zip codes in Austin's Eastern Crescent area from July to September 2021 prior to tax filing outreach efforts.

In the second year of this study, TXICFW administered the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training Follow-Up Survey approximately six to eight months after staff attended the training to assess changes in knowledge and referral behaviors. Interviews were also conducted with staff to understand how they felt about the training and in what ways the training impacted their work. Lastly, TXICFW administered the Austin Families Year 2 Survey to the Austin Families sample identified in Year 1 to collect information on tax filing behaviors, risk and protective factors of ACEs, and clients' use of free tax -preparation services.

A second round of the ACES and Mitigating Factor Training was implemented from November 2022 to January 2023, with some adjustments made in the training content from previous years. These included updates related to Foundation Communities' free tax filing program,

information about 2022 federal tax credits (Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit) available to families, clarification on how to access Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services, and other adjustments to ensure the training remained accessible, relevant, and actionable.

TXICFW administered the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training Pre- and Post- Surveys immediately before and after this training. In May 2023, TXICFW emailed the 6-month follow-up survey to participants who completed both the training and pre- and post- surveys. In June 2023, TXICFW also conducted the Austin Families Year 3 Survey. Interviews were conducted with a subsample of Austin Families Year 3 Survey participants who indicated they would be interested in participating in an interview or focus group. The research team conducted interviews with four participants who did not file taxes, four participants who filed taxes with Foundation Communities, and four participants who filed their taxes elsewhere.

The Current Report

The current report focuses on findings from the Austin Families Year 3 Survey, ACEs Mitigating Factors Training surveys, and interviews with a subsample of families who participated in the Austin Families Year 3 Survey. This data was collected between November 2022 and June 2023. Additionally, this report examines the overall effectiveness of outreach and referral activities by measuring changes in tax filing behavior and ACEs risk and protective factors in the Austin Families sample across the three years of this study.



Evaluation Design & Methodology

Research Question

Using a mixed methods design, TXICFW assessed the following research aims by evaluating the corresponding research questions:

Research Aim 1: Assess the effectiveness of staff training.

- To what extent does training frontline staff increase knowledge about ACEs?
- To what extent does training frontline staff increase knowledge about the EITC and CTC?
- What proportion of frontline staff share information about the EITC and CTC with the community within six months of training?

Research Aim 2: Assess the effectiveness of participant outreach.

- To what extent do the EITC and CTC claims increase among families receiving outreach services?
- To what extent does receipt of the EITC and CTC increase among families receiving outreach services?
- To what extent do protective factors increase among families receiving outreach services?
- To what extent do risk factors decrease among families receiving outreach services?

Research Aim 3: Assess the value of each component of the approach.

- Which components of the intervention enhanced the success of the project?
- What components of the intervention detracted from the success of the project?
- To what extent do community members perceive that outreach efforts align with their cultural values and linguistic needs?

Over the three-year period, researchers collected and analyzed quantitative data from pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys of staff from community organizations who participated in the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training, as well as annual surveys of Austin families. Researchers also conducted interviews with a subsample of staff survey participants in Year 2 and a subsample of Austin Families Year 3 Survey participants. The following sections provide further detail on the measures and data utilized in Year 3 of this study, with reference to data collected and analyzed in previous years.

ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training

SAMPLE

From November 2022 to January 2023, Foundation Communities implemented its second year of the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training. Foundation Communities invited staff members from local organizations who work directly with clients to participate in the one-hour training session led by a social worker. A pre-training survey link was provided at the beginning of the training and a post-training survey link was provided at the end of the training. To help increase response rates, a \$15 gift card was provided to one randomly selected staff member in each training who completed both surveys. In Year 3, a total of 68 frontline staff members from 14 community organizations completed the training. Fifty-four of these staff members (79.4%) completed both the pre- and post- surveys.

In February 2023, frontline staff who participated in the training received a follow-up email from Foundation Communities with a 2023 tax help flyer and a training supplementation packet as well as certificates for completing the training. In May 2023, individual survey links were emailed to the 54 training participants who completed the pre- and post- surveys. Assertive outreach strategies such as sending additional reminder emails and conducting reminder phone calls were used to increase response rates.

Of the 54 participants who had completed the pre- and post- surveys, 39 completed the follow-up survey (72.2%). A logistic regression was performed to determine if there were any differences at baseline (pre-survey) between those who completed the 6-month follow-up survey and those who did not complete it on the following variables:

- Familiarity with ACEs (pre-survey)
- Number of ACEs quiz questions answered correctly (pre-survey)
- Direct work with children or families (pre-survey)
- Shared information about tax credits with clients last year (pre-survey)
- Number of tax quiz questions answered correctly (pre-survey)
- Knowledge of Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services (pre-survey)
- Had a graduate level degree—master's or higher (pre-survey)
- Prior participation in the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training (pre-survey)

Results showed that there were no significant differences between staff who participated in the follow-up survey and those who did not on the variables listed above.

The sample number in the results section of this report may vary depending on the type of analysis that was conducted and the number of participants who answered the question. In cases where no comparisons were made across surveys, data could be provided for all participants who completed that survey. When changes from pre- to post- to follow-up were being assessed, findings were limited to the 39 participants who completed all three surveys.

MEASURES

All measures, unless specifically noted, were included in the pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior after participating in the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training.

ACEs and Federal Tax Credit Knowledge

To measure the change in knowledge about ACEs and federal tax credits such as the EITC and the CTC, staff were asked to complete a six-question quiz on ACEs risk and protective factors and a two-question quiz on federal tax credits. The ACEs and federal tax credit quizzes were scored independently at pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys to assess changes in knowledge. Each correct answer was worth one point. Scores for ACEs knowledge ranged from no correct answers (i.e., a score of 0) to all correct answers (i.e., 6). Scores for federal tax credits ranged from no correct answers (i.e., a score of 0) to all correct answers (i.e., 2). An average ACEs knowledge score and an average federal tax credit knowledge score were calculated at pre-, post-, and follow-up.

Child Development Beliefs

Attitudes and beliefs of an individual or an organization can influence their professional behaviors.^{xv} Staff were asked a four-item measure to rate their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Two statements assessed the strength of staff's beliefs about children's predisposition to developmental outcomes, and two statements assessed the strength of staff's beliefs about whether external environmental supports improve children's developmental outcomes. These belief items were used to examine whether more staff hold attitudes consistent with the idea that social and economic supports can improve children's outcomes at post and follow-up than at pre.

Professional Responsibility

On the pre-survey, participants were asked to indicate whether they shared tax filing information and/or referred clients to tax preparation services during the previous tax season; to what extent they viewed preventing ACEs as a part of their job; and how confident they felt sharing information about tax preparation services. On the post- and follow-up surveys, participants were also asked to what extent they viewed preventing ACEs as a part of their role and their level of confidence in sharing information about tax preparation services. Additionally, they were asked about their intention to share tax filing information and/or refer clients to tax preparation services in the future. The follow-up survey then asked participants to report whether they had shared tax filing information and/or referred clients to tax preparation services for the given tax year.

Prior Use of Foundation Communities' Free Tax Prep Services

The follow-up survey included an additional question that asked participants about their personal use of Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

This report examines differences between pre-, post-, and follow-up scores for the 39 staff who took all three surveys. In sections where differences are not compared, findings are reported for 1) the number of staff who answered the questions even if they didn't participate in all three surveys and 2) the 39 staff who completed all three surveys.

All reported descriptive outcomes are unadjusted values or raw proportions. Repeated measures analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine differences in means for ACEs knowledge and federal tax credit knowledge at pre-, post-, and follow-up. Additionally, paired sample *t* tests were used to compare behavior change from pre- to follow-up. Qualitative responses from the staff survey were coded and analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

Austin Families Surveys

SAMPLE

The sample for the Austin Families Surveys was a convenience sample of families residing in the Eastern Crescent with children who met eligibility criteria for the EITC during the 2020 tax season. Foundation Communities and partner organizations distributed the Austin Families Year 1 Survey via social media platforms, flyers, community events, listservs, parent groups, and text messaging services. From July to September 2021, 624 eligible participants completed the Austin Families Year 1 Survey. Eligible participants were defined as individuals over the age of 18 residing in one of 12 targeted zip codes within Austin's Eastern Crescent with at least one child under the age of 16. Participants also had to be eligible for the federal EITC, as calculated by marital status, income, and the number of dependents. Importantly, the data for Year 1, the baseline year, were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and the rollout of the expansion of the Child Tax Credit with the passing of the American Rescue Plan Act. After reviewing data for all three surveys, TXICFW identified 55 cases in the original sample that were determined to be fraudulent. These cases were removed from the final sample in Year 3. The final sample included 569 eligible participants.

Survey Participation

Researchers sent all participants who completed the Austin Families Year 1 Survey an email requesting their participation in the Austin Families Year 2 and Year 3 Surveys. The Year 2 survey was available from July 12 to August 1, 2022, and the Year 3 survey was available from June 2 to June 21, 2023. Within each survey window, participants received three reminder emails and at least one reminder call when a phone number was available. Foundation Communities also provided a \$15 gift card incentive for completing the Year 1 survey, a \$20 gift card incentive for completing the Year 2 survey, and a \$25 gift card incentive for completing the Year 3 survey.

A summary of participation status for the Austin Families Year 2 and Year 3 Surveys is provided in Table 1. Of the 569 participants, 286 (50.3%) completed at least 50% of the Austin Families

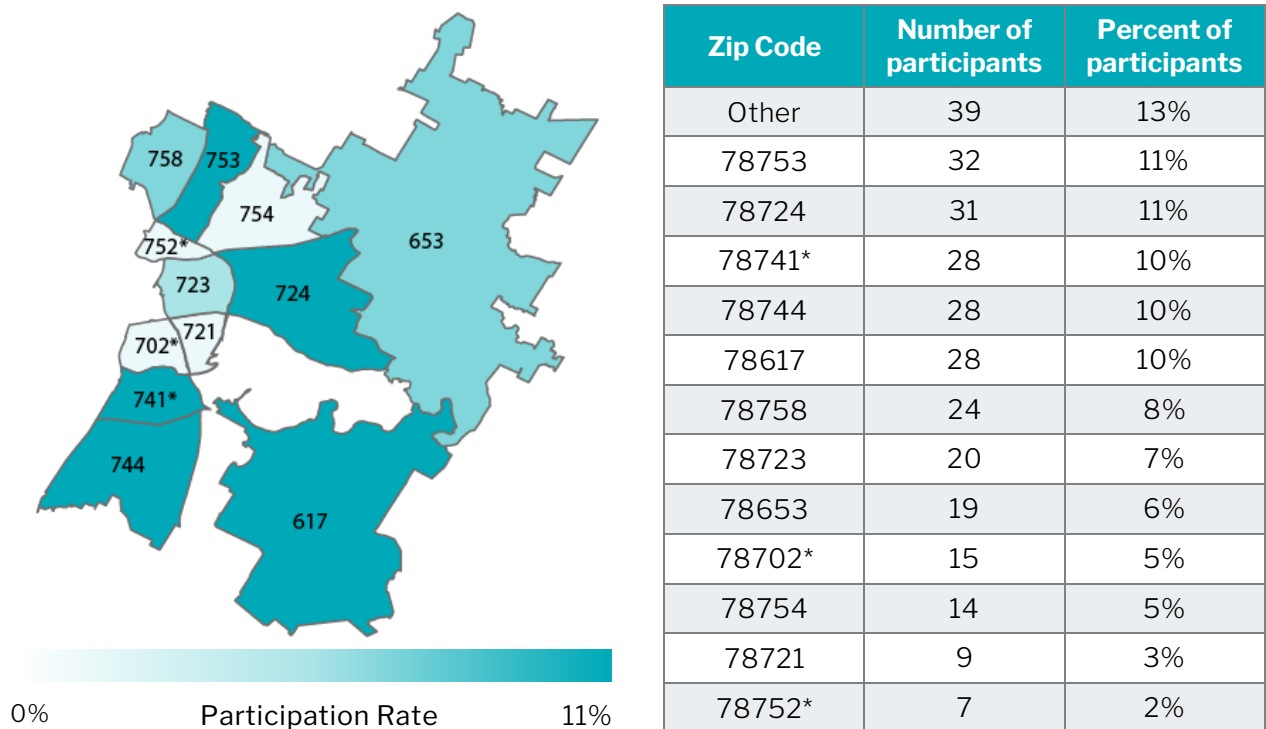
Year 2 Survey and 294 (51.7%) completed at least 50% of the Austin Families Year 3 Survey. A total of 242 participants (42.5%) completed all three surveys.

Table 1. Austin Families Survey Participation Status (N = 569)

Status	Year 2		Year 3		All 3 Surveys	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Completed at least 50%	286	50.3%	294	51.7%	242	42.5%
Completed less than 50%	18	3.2%	13	2.3%		
Declined survey	1	0.2%	4	0.7%		
No valid contact information	39	6.9%	45	7.9%		
Not completed	225	39.5%	213	37.4%		

Figure 1 provides a summary of participation by zip code for participants in Year 3.

Figure 1. Participation by Zip Code in Year 3 (N = 294)



Numbers reflect the zip code with the leading “78” removed for space considerations. A * after the zip code indicates there is a Foundation Communities Tax Help Center located within that zip code. This year, tax help centers were also located in the following nearby zip codes: 78728, 78664, 78704, and 78745.

A logistic regression was conducted to determine whether there were any differences at baseline (Year 1) between those who completed the Year 3 survey and those who did not, based on the following variables:

- Gender
- Primary language spoken at home
- Race and ethnicity
- Highest level of education (associate degree or higher)
- Marital status
- Age of participant
- Household income in 2020
- Familiarity with Foundation Communities
- Filing status in 2020
- Claimed EITC or CTC in 2020

Findings reveal some differences between those who completed the Year 3 survey and those who did not complete it. Having a higher level of education and being female were positively associated with Year 3 survey participation. Individuals with an associate degree or higher were 1.8 times as likely to participate in the Year 3 survey, and participants who identified as female were 4.1 times as likely to participate. Language spoken at home was also associated with survey participation in Year 3. The odds of survey participation in Year 3 for participants who spoke Spanish as their primary language at home was 37% lower than those who spoke English or another language. There were no associations between survey participation in Year 3 and race, ethnicity, marital status, age, household income, familiarity with Foundation Communities, filing status in 2020, or claiming of federal tax credits (EITC or CTC) in 2020. While participants were similar on most characteristics, differences in gender, language spoken at home, and education level between those who responded and those who did not should be considered when drawing conclusions about the Year 3 findings, as they may not reflect the entire sample.

An additional analysis was run to test the differences between those who completed all three surveys and those who did not, using the same variables. Gender and education level were also associated with survey participation in all three surveys; however, language spoken at home was not. Individuals with an associate degree or higher were 2.5 times as likely to complete all three surveys. Participants who identified as female were 2.7 times as likely to complete all three surveys. There were no associations between a participant completing all three surveys and their race, ethnicity, marital status, age, primary language spoken at home, household income, familiarity with Foundation Communities, filing status in 2020, or claiming of federal tax credits (EITC or CTC) in 2020.

MEASURES

Tax Filing Behaviors

Participants were asked to report on their yearly income, tax return amount, use of their tax refund, whether they filed a tax return for the previous tax year, and whether they claimed the EITC and CTC for the year 2020. Researchers also asked about participants' knowledge of tax credits and their use of tax preparation services, such as Foundation Communities' services.

Family Wellbeing

To measure family wellbeing, multiple measures were adapted to assess potential risk and protective factors such as economic and material hardship, mental wellbeing, familial supports, and environmental stressors.

Economic and Material Hardship

Economic and material hardship was measured using 20 items that assess participants' perception of economic hardship across several areas, including how much financial strain they felt, their ability to make ends meet, having enough money for necessities, and whether they had to make any lifestyle adjustments due to financial need. All items were summed to create an overall hardship score, with higher scores indicating a greater perception of economic hardship.

Risk and Protective Factors

Risk and protective factors were measured using the Protective Factors Survey, 2nd Edition, to assess changes in protective factors over time across three key areas: family functioning/resiliency, social support, and nurturing and attachment.^{xvi} An average score for each key area was calculated, with higher scores indicating more protective factors.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Center for Epidemiological Studies of Depression Short Form (CES-D) is a self-reported measure assessing the presence or absence of negative and positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors experienced the week prior to taking the survey.^{xvii} For the purposes of this study, the CES-D was used to screen for symptoms associated with depression.

Environmental Stressors

Participants were also asked about their childcare arrangements, work environment, and other environmental stressors families often face.

Knowledge of Foundation Communities' Free Tax Services

One additional question asked both filers and non-filers how they learned about Foundation Communities Prosper Centers' free tax filing services.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

For the Austin Families Year 3 Survey, data was descriptively analyzed based on point-in-time data collected in summer of 2023. All descriptive outcomes are unadjusted values or raw proportions. Two-sample t tests or proportion tests were used to test all items for statistical significance for all reported values that compare measures across tax filing groups or race/ethnic groups.

Participants were asked to identify their race and ethnicity by selecting any of the following options: American Indian, Asian, Black, Latino/a/x, Pacific Islander, White, other, or prefer not to answer. For respondents who identified as multiracial (selecting multiple racial/ethnic categories), researchers assigned them to the reported racial/ethnic group that historically has experienced structural racism and systemic barriers that create and perpetuate societal and economic disadvantages. For example, if an individual self-identifies as both Black and White, researchers assigned their race as Black; for an individual who self-identifies as both Latino/a/x and White, researchers assigned their ethnicity as Latino/a/x. A small number of participants identified with multiple race/ethnic groups that have historically experienced structural racism and systematic barriers. For example, an individual who identified as Latino/a/x and Black would fall into this category. For the purposes of this study, these participants were included in the “Other” category along with participants who identified as American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, or preferred not to answer, as the sample size was too small to report results of these categories individually. As a result, researchers were only able to present findings across four racial/ethnic categories: Black, Latino/a/x, White, and Other, as described above.

Throughout the report, we focus on two tax filing status groups created based on participants’ reported tax behavior: 1) EITC claimers, or participants who both filed taxes and claimed the EITC, and 2) non-filers, or participants who did not file their 2022 tax return and therefore did not claim the EITC.

Repeated measures analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were used to examine differences in tax filing behavior, claiming of federal tax credits, and risk and protective factors across all three surveys. Non-parametric analyses were used when assumptions for the parametric tests were not met (e.g., low sample, size, highly skewed data, etc.).

Austin Families Interviews

SAMPLE

Interviews were conducted with a subsample of 12 participants who had completed the Austin Families Year 3 Survey and expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview. Four of the interviewees filed taxes for the 2022 tax year with Foundation Communities, four filed elsewhere, and four did not file their 2022 taxes. All interviews were conducted and recorded by phone via Microsoft Teams. Four interviews were conducted in Spanish and the remaining eight interviews were conducted in English. Foundation Communities provided a \$40 gift card incentive to interviewees.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Researchers created a semi-structured interview guide for conducting interviews with the subsample of Austin Families Year 3 Survey participants who indicated they would be interested in participating in interviews. The interview guide was also translated to Spanish so that interviews could be conducted with Spanish-speaking participants. Questions in the interview guide, which can be found in the appendix, aimed to gather more information about interviewee experiences living in Austin as well as their understanding and experiences with tax filing, Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services, and federal tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

Recordings were submitted to Landmark Associates, an online data transcription service, where they were transcribed verbatim and returned to the research team as Microsoft Word documents. Researchers developed a coding scheme based on the semi-structured interview guide and coded transcripts using Dedoose, a qualitative coding software. Two members of the research team independently coded transcripts and reviewed codes before submitting a combined version to the qualitative project lead, who gave the transcripts a final review to mitigate any inconsistencies in coding. Coding excerpts were exported to Microsoft Excel and analyzed for major and minor themes. All participant information was stored on UT Box, a secure cloud-based server, and qualitative data were de-identified before reporting.



Findings

ACEs Mitigating Factors Training

The following section discusses findings collected through surveys with staff about the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training implemented from November 2022 to January 2023.

ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

Participant Characteristics

Thirty-nine staff members completed the pre-, post-, and follow-up training surveys. Table 2 provides basic information about these participants.

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Summary
Highest Level of Education	3% had a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) 5% had some college but no degree 5% had an associate degree 50% had a bachelor's degree 37% had a graduate or professional degree <i>One participant did not specify level of education</i>
Organization and Role at Follow-Up	100% were working for the same organization 74% were in the same role
Direct Work Experience with Clients at Time of Pre-Survey	82% indicated they often or always work with families in a typical month 82% directed low- and moderate-income families in Austin to other community resources that may benefit them 77% identified the needs of clients informally and 51% used formal assessments
Foundation Communities' Tax Preparation Services	32% of staff had personally used Foundation Communities' Tax Preparation Services <i>2 participants preferred not to say</i>
ACES and Mitigating Factors Training	28% indicated they had taken this training previously
Participating organizations: Any Baby Can, Austin Independent School District (AISD), AVANCE - Austin, Foundation Communities, Friends of the Children Austin, Goodwill Central Texas, Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA), LifeWorks, Saint Louise House, Todos Juntos Learning Center, and UT Austin Whole Communities Whole Health.	

PARTICIPANT TRAINING EXPERIENCE

General Feedback and Perceived Impact

Staff reported overall satisfaction with the training, indicating the training gave them more awareness of ACEs, strategies to discuss ACEs with families, and resources to help families strengthen protective factors.

In the post-training survey, one open-ended question asked staff if they had any feedback for Foundation Communities. In addition to describing their satisfaction with the training, staff asked for more information on a variety of topics including:

- How child support impacts filing
- Foundation Communities services outside of tax preparation
- Filing with an Individual Tax Identification Number
- How to warn families about predatory loans and high interest rates
- How to connect training information to general financial counseling services
- How the training topics impact people of color
- How disability income factors into tax credits
- Tips for difficult conversations with clients about ACEs

The same question was included in the 6-month follow-up survey. Staff again reported their overall satisfaction with the training as well as the following feedback for Foundation Communities:

- Providing a takeaway pamphlet on ACEs
- Including more resources in Spanish
- Expanding on the connection between ACEs, protective factors, and tax resources
- Conducting outreach for tax services at grocery stores, flea markets, and churches
- Providing information earlier before families decide to pay for tax filing
- Creating more space to respond to nuanced survey questions
- Clarifying the goal of outreach for tax services when advertising the training

In the post-training survey, one open-ended question asked staff how the training impacted their work with families. Staff said that the training gave them more awareness of the ACEs families may have experienced. Staff also said the training provided them with strategies to discuss these topics with families, and resources to help families build protective factors, including directing them toward Foundation Communities' tax preparation services and making them aware of federal tax credits.

“I am aware but will be MORE aware of how ACEs are affecting our clients’ abilities, strengths, AND weaknesses and health problems. I will try to do what I can to refer families to the appropriate resources to prevent ACEs and educate families about ACEs.” — Staff survey participant

“I am more likely to discuss tax information to assist families, especially with the tax season approaching. [I will offer] more opportunities for families to learn about the information discussed today so that families that need the help can come to me directly and privately.” – Staff survey participant

Staff were asked the same question in the follow-up survey, and responses were similar to the post-training survey.

“Gave me a new community resource to share with the parents that I work with that will provide them with an easy, free way to file their taxes. Filing taxes can be stressful for most people. Foundation Communities can alleviate the burden felt by families during tax season.” – Staff survey participant

“[I now] understand the importance of becoming familiar with factors that affect that family and how Foundation Communities can serve them by providing resources which may deter trauma; for both parent and child.” – Staff survey participant

Challenges With Implementation

The challenges staff anticipated or encountered in implementing what they had learned from the training included discomfort talking to clients about ACEs, issues with client unemployment or documentation status, and giving clients resources before they have chosen to file elsewhere.

The post-training survey asked staff what challenges they anticipated as they incorporated material from the training into their work. Several staff mentioned discomfort engaging in conversations about ACEs with clients. As one participant stated:

“Sometimes building trust with families that are experiencing trauma may be difficult and be a long process. Patience is key and establishing that trust is paramount.” – Staff survey participant

Staff mentioned other anticipated challenges including:

- Clients not utilizing available resources
- Client unemployment
- Clients without Social Security numbers
- Not enough knowledge to discuss taxes with clients
- Giving clients tax resources too late

The 6-month follow-up survey asked staff what challenges they have encountered when talking to families about filing their return since the training. A few staff said that they are not able to give clients flyers or information before clients decided to file elsewhere. Other challenges mentioned included client unemployment, documentation status issues, or lack of understanding regarding tax filing. Related to documentation status, one staff said:

“Some feel it's not right that they can only claim some of their children (documented) and not all their children (undocumented) when they are being provided for equally.” — Staff survey participant

ACES AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Knowledge of ACEs

Staff survey respondents were knowledgeable about ACEs at baseline, and while their ACE knowledge scores were slightly higher on the post- and follow-up surveys, this difference was not statistically significant.

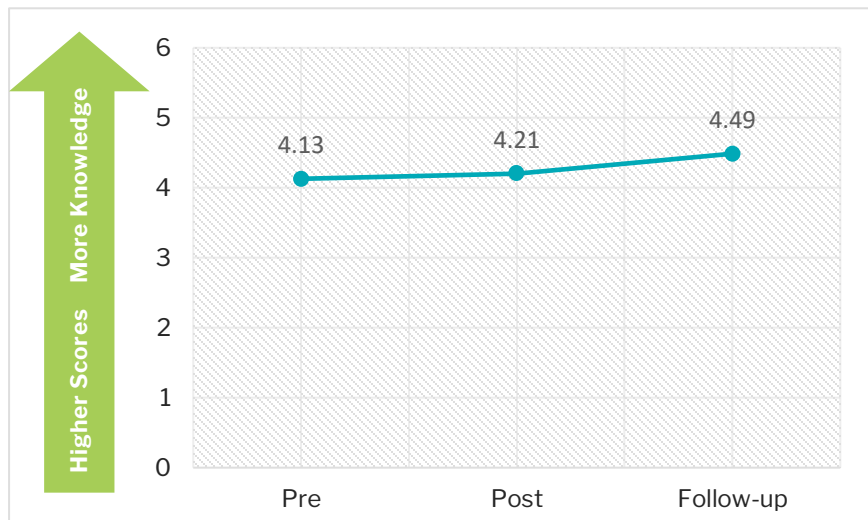
Survey participants were asked to rate their level of familiarity with ACEs on the pre-survey. Most participants indicated they were at least somewhat familiar with ACEs prior to the training. Table 3 summarizes responses.

Table 3. Level of familiarity with ACEs prior to training (N = 39)

Level of familiarity	%
Not at all familiar	15%
Slightly familiar	26%
Somewhat familiar	23%
Very familiar	36%

Staff were also asked to complete a six-item quiz about ACEs on the pre-, post- and follow-up surveys. Overall, staff scored high on these items across all three time points. ACE knowledge scores were slightly higher on the post- and follow-up surveys; however, this difference was not statistically significant (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Mean ACEs Scores on the Pre-, Post- and Follow-Up Surveys (N = 39)

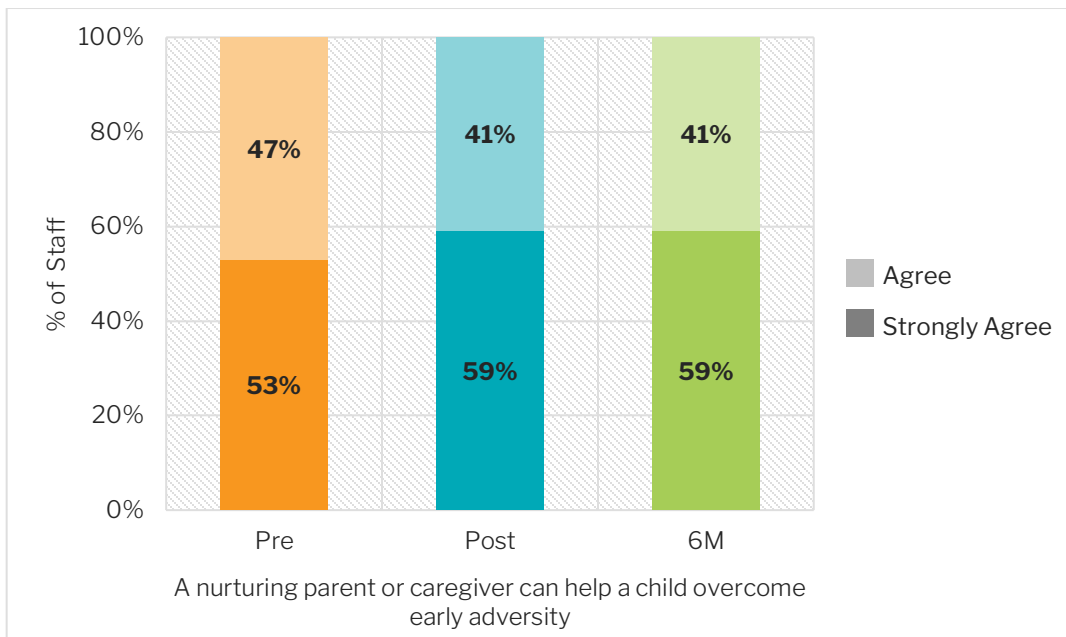


Beliefs About Child Development

Six months after the training, most staff survey respondents still believed that children could overcome adversity with the right environmental supports.

Research demonstrates that while early life experiences impact children’s brain development and early adversity can lead to negative lifelong outcomes,^{xviii} ensuring children and their families have access to adequate resources can prevent early adversity from occurring.^{xix} Additionally, research demonstrates that attachment between children and a nurturing caregiver early in life builds child resilience to overcome adversity.^{xx} Figure 3 demonstrates that in the pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys, almost all staff survey respondents believed that children could overcome adversity with the help of a nurturing parent or caregiver. Close to 60% of staff strongly agreed with this statement at post- and follow-up.

Figure 3. Beliefs about Children’s Environments

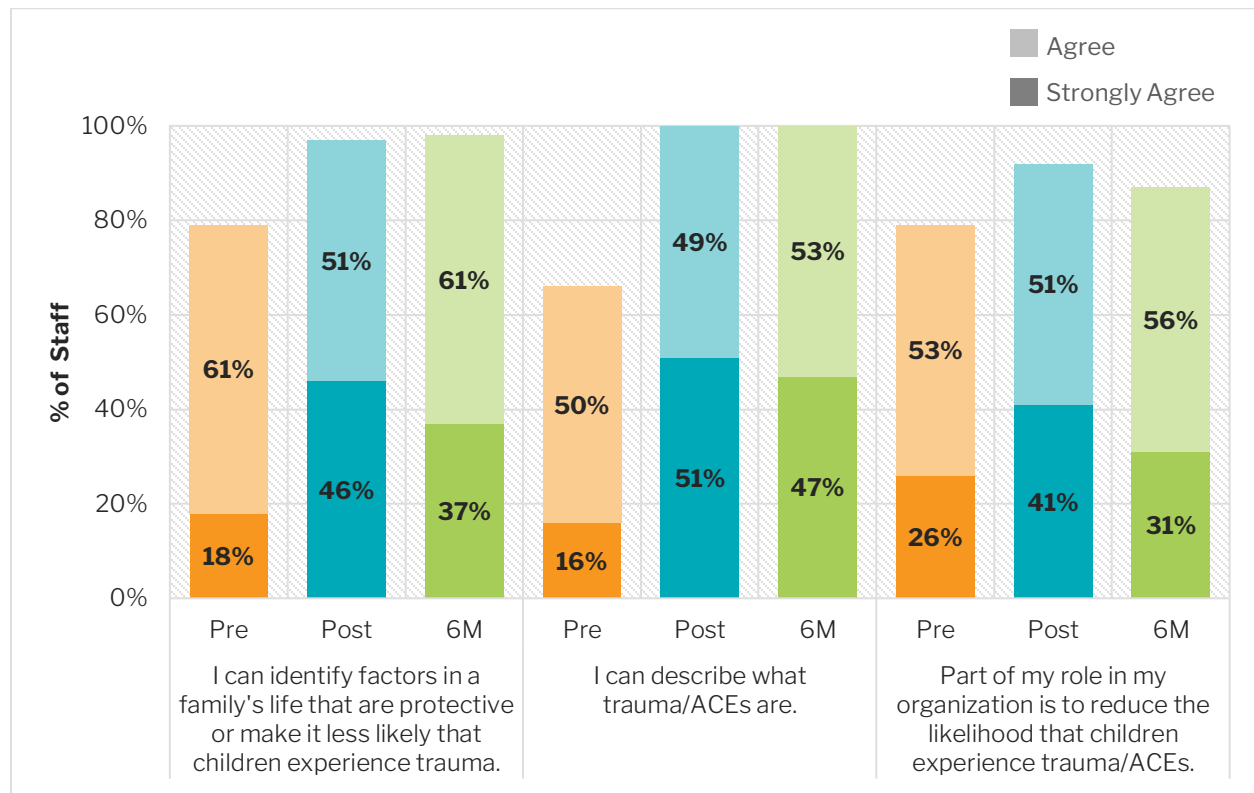


Understanding of Trauma and Professional Role in Promoting Resilience

The training had a significant impact on staff understanding of trauma, their ability to identify family protective factors, and their professional role to promote resilience.

The pre-, post-, and follow-up training surveys also measured staff understanding of trauma and their professional role to promote resilience. This included being able to describe what trauma and ACEs are, identifying protective factors with families, and knowing that part of their role is to reduce the likelihood of childhood trauma and ACEs. The training had a significant, lasting impact on the number of staff who agreed they could identify family protective factors and explain what ACEs are. Staff scores were significantly higher on the post- and follow-up surveys compared to the pre-survey. A significant increase was seen from pre- to post- in the number of staff who agreed that part of their role was to help reduce the likelihood that children experience ACEs; however, this increase was not maintained over time (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Understanding of Trauma and Professional Role to Promote Resilience (N = 39)



TAX CREDITS AND TAX PREPARATION RESOURCES

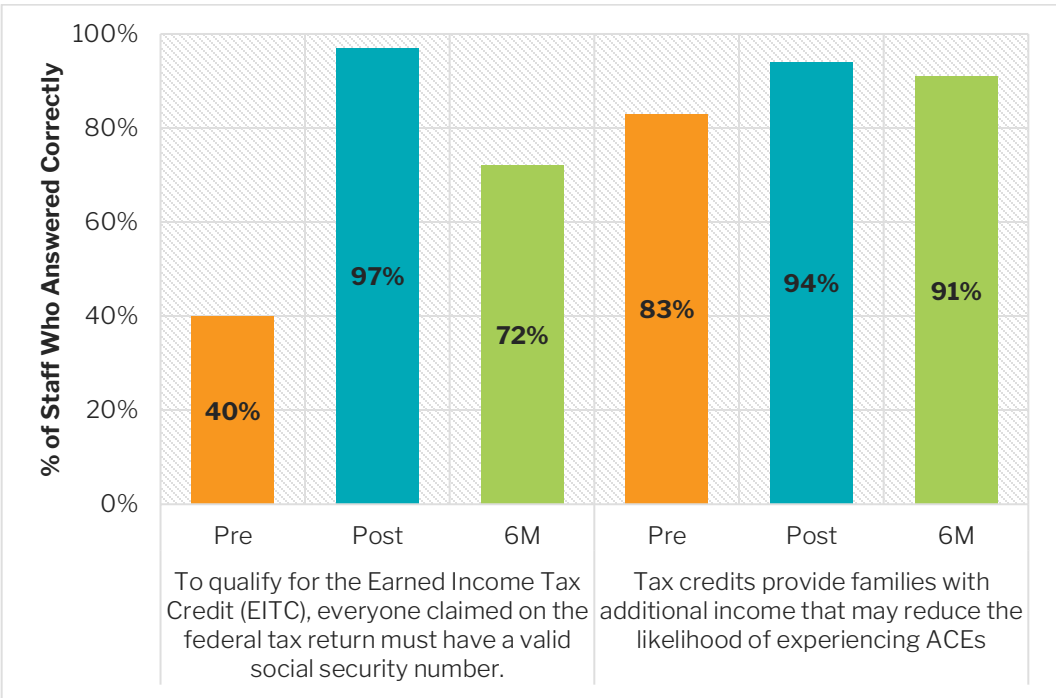
Knowledge of Tax Credits and Tax Preparation Resources

Staff maintained a high level of understanding about the relationship between taxes and ACEs and increased their knowledge about what qualifies families for the EITC.

Tax credits and tax preparation services are key factors in boosting resilience for families, making it important for staff who interact with clients on a regular basis to have knowledge of both. This year, more emphasis was placed on helping staff understand tax credits available to families during the training. Two questions assessed tax knowledge on the pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys. The first question focused on EITC eligibility. Understanding that all household members need a Social Security number to receive the EITC is important for anyone who serves families that might have household members without a Social Security number. The percentage of staff who indicated that a valid Social Security number is needed for the EITC significantly increased from 40% on the pre-survey to 97% on the post-survey. The percentage of staff who answered this question correctly dropped to 72% on the follow-up survey; however, this percentage was still significantly higher than the percentage who answered correctly on the pre-survey. In year 2, only 53% of participants answered this question correctly at follow-up.

The second tax question focused on the relationship between taxes and ACEs. A high percentage of staff answered this question correctly on the pre-survey (83%), post-survey (94%) and follow-up survey (91%). These percentages were not statistically different across time (see Figure 5).

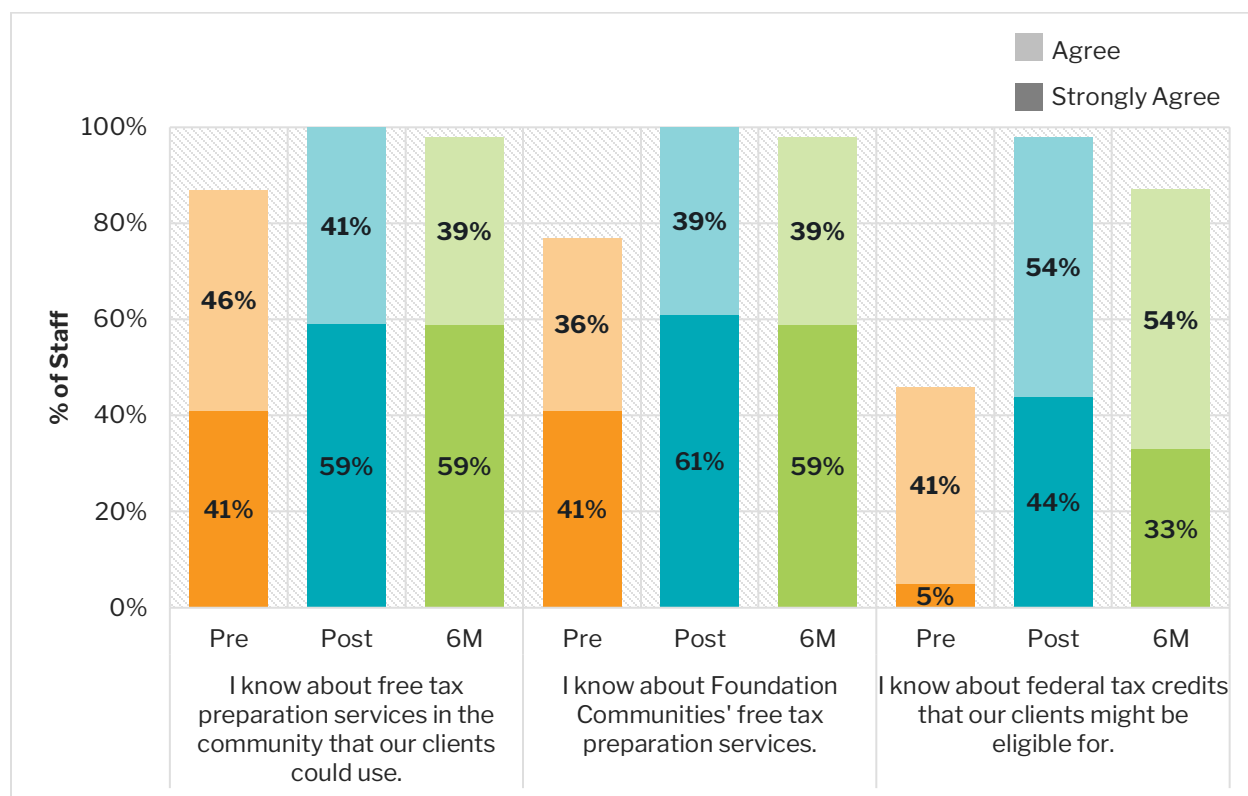
Figure 5. Tax Credit Knowledge Quiz Scores Over Time



The pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys also asked staff if they knew about free tax preparation services in the community, specifically Foundation Communities' tax preparation services, and about the federal tax credits for which their clients might be eligible. There was a significant increase in knowledge from pre- to post-survey on all three items. This progress was maintained on the follow-up survey.

Only 5% of participants strongly agreed that they knew about federal tax credits their clients might be eligible for on the pre-survey. This percentage increased to 44% after the training and was closer to 33% at follow-up (see Figure 6). In year 2, only 22% of participants indicated they had a strong understanding of federal tax credits at follow-up, suggesting that placing more emphasis on federal tax credits was an effective modification to the training this year. It is also worth noting that this year, 97% of staff either agreed or strongly agreed they knew about federal tax credits their clients might be eligible for on the follow-up. While ideally more staff would have strongly agreed, the high percentage of overall agreement with this statement indicates that staff have a general understanding of federal tax credit eligibility.

Figure 6. Knowledge About Tax Credits and Tax Preparation Services



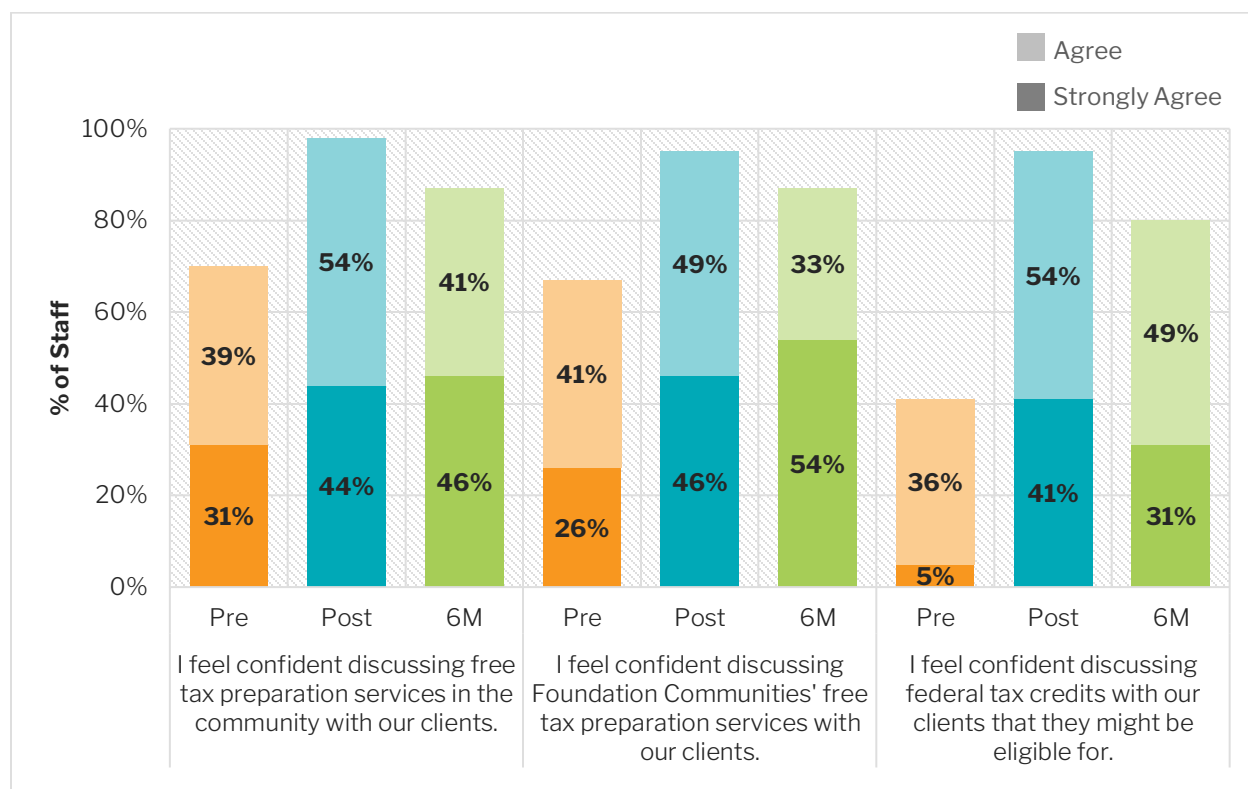
Confidence in Discussing Tax Preparation Services and Tax Credits

Staff confidence in discussing free tax preparation services and tax credits increased after the training and was maintained through follow-up. However, a significant proportion of staff still did not feel confident discussing these topics with clients after the training, particularly around eligibility for federal tax credits.

Staff not only need to be knowledgeable about what tax credits and tax preparation services are available to families, but also must have the confidence to discuss these services with families. The percentage of staff survey respondents who strongly agreed they felt confident discussing free tax preparation services increased from pre-survey (30%) to post-survey (44%) and was maintained at the time of follow-up (46%). The pattern was similar for those who strongly agreed they felt confident discussing Foundation Communities' tax preparation services. About one fourth of participants strongly agreed they felt confident at the time of the pre-survey, which increased to roughly half at post (46%) and follow-up (54%). (See Figure 7).

Overall, staff were not as confident discussing federal tax credits for which their clients might be eligible. Only 5% strongly agreed they felt confident before the training, and this percentage significantly increased to 41% after the training. At the time of follow-up, an increase was maintained, but only 31% strongly agreed they felt confident in this area (see Figure 7). Trainings may need additional information and/or practice discussing tax credits and eligibility with families (particularly around immigration status).

Figure 7. Confidence in Discussing Tax Credits and Tax Preparation Services



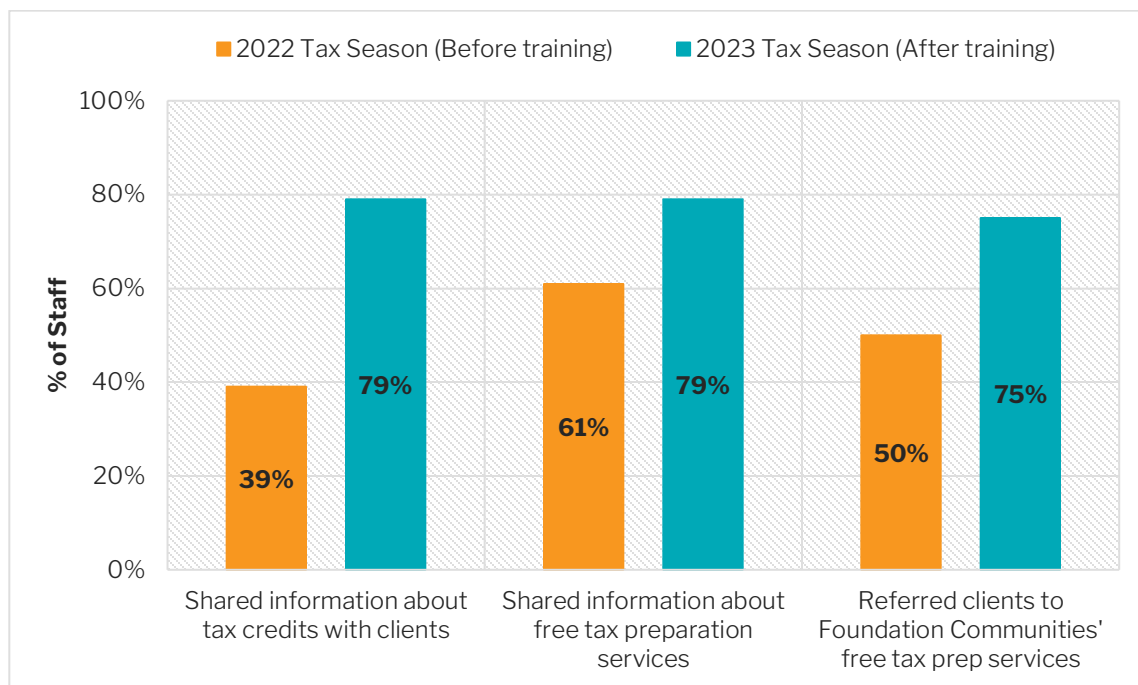
Referrals and Outreach

After completing the training, staff were more likely to share information about tax credits and tax preparation services. They were also more likely to refer clients to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services.

Staff were encouraged to share information with their clients about tax credits and refer them to free tax preparation services to promote free tax filing and claiming of federal tax credits among families in the Eastern Crescent community.

- During the 2022 tax season (prior to the training), only **39%** of participants had shared information about tax credits. During the 2023 tax season (after the training), this number significantly increased to **79%** of participants who had shared info about tax credits with their clients.
- During the 2022 tax season, **61%** of participants shared information about free tax services. During the 2023 tax season, this number significantly increased to **79%** of participants who had shared information about free tax services with their clients.
- During the 2022 tax season, **50%** of participants had referred clients to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services. This number significantly increased to **75%** during the 2023 tax season.

Figure 8. Outreach and Referral Behavior of Staff Before and After the Training (N = 33)



Austin Families Year 3 Survey and Interview Findings

The following section includes findings from the Austin Families Year 3 Survey and interviews. As discussed earlier, there were some differences between participants in the sample who responded to the Year 3 survey and those who did not. Individuals with an associate degree or higher were 1.8 times as likely to participate; participants who identified as female were 4.1 times as likely to participate; and the odds of participating were 37% lower for participants who spoke Spanish as their primary language in their home. Some caution should be made when interpreting findings, as they may not reflect the entire sample.

ABOUT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

The following table provides demographic information about the 294 participants who completed the Austin Families Year 3 Survey in 2023.

Table 4. Demographics of Year 3 Survey Participants (N = 294)

Characteristic	Year 3 Summary
Age	35 years: average age of survey participants in Year 3 9% were younger than 25 years old 18% were between 25 and 30 years old 56% were between 31 and 40 years old 17% were 41 years or older
Dependents	17% had one dependent, 39% had two dependents, 20% had three dependents, and 24% had four or more dependents
Race/Ethnicity	65% identified as Latino/a/x 21% identified as White 11% identified as Black 2% selected another race or more than one race
Education	23% did not have a high school diploma or an equivalent degree 26% had a high school diploma or an equivalent degree 26% had some college 7% had an associate degree 19% had a bachelor's degree or higher
Home Language	62% primarily spoke English 36% primarily spoke Spanish <i>Remaining participants spoke Arabic, French, Nepali, Russian or Yoruba</i>
Gender	92% of survey participants were female
Marital Status	52% were legally married
2022 Household Income	48% indicated their household income was less than \$30,000 37% indicated a household income between \$30,001 and \$50,000 15% indicated their household income was over \$50,000

ABOUT INTERVIEWEES

Researchers conducted interviews with four caregivers who filed their taxes through Foundation Communities, four who filed elsewhere, and four who did not file their taxes for the 2022 tax year, totaling 12 interviews.

All interviewees indicated in the Austin Families Year 3 Survey that they would be interested in participating in an interview or focus groups. Some of the following demographic information was pulled from the Austin Families Year 3 Survey, and some was collected in individual interviews. All interviewees self-identified as female, and their ages ranged from 20 to 42 years old. Income ranged from less than \$5,000 to about \$50,000 annually, and education ranged from no formal schooling to some college. Three fourths of interviewees identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x and the remaining interviewees identified as either White or Black/African American. Interviewees were a mixture of married and single caregivers with the number of children per family ranging from one to four, and their children's ages ranged from infant to teenager. Four interviews were conducted in Spanish and the remaining interviews were conducted in English.

For the purpose of this report, interviewees who used Foundation Communities to file their taxes will be referred to as FC filer interviewees; interviewees who filed elsewhere will be referred to as non-FC filer interviewees; and interviewees who did not file for the 2022 tax year will be referred to as non-filer interviewees.

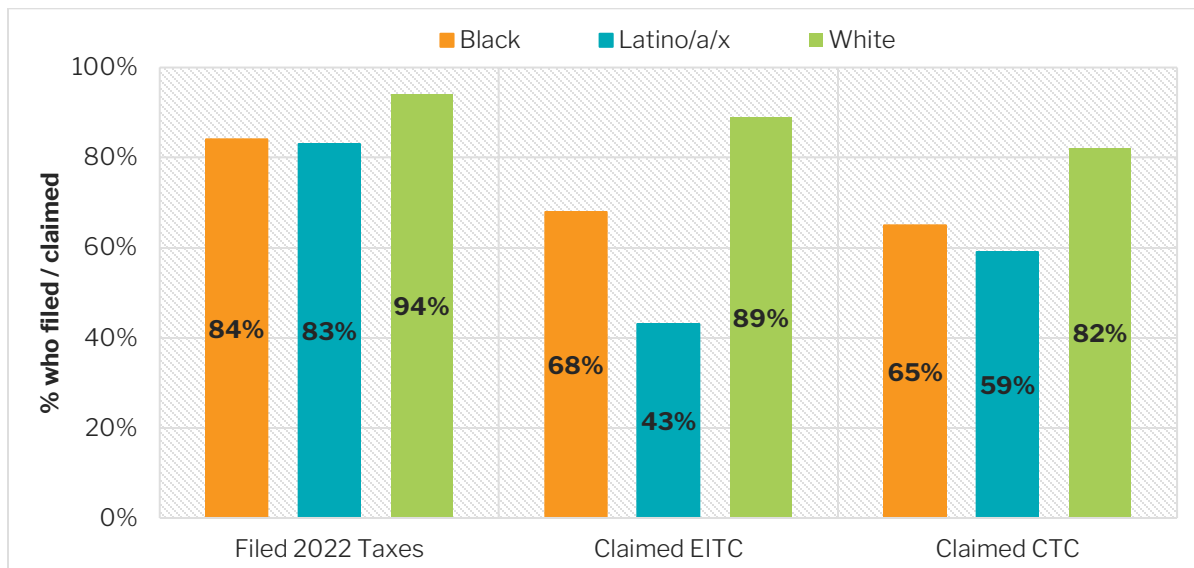
TAX FILING BEHAVIOR IN YEAR 3

The majority of survey participants filed their taxes this year, and most of those who filed received a tax refund. A little over half of survey participants claimed federal tax credits; however, claiming varied significantly depending on participants' race.

A high percentage of survey participants filed their taxes for the 2022 tax year (86%), and 85% of these participants indicated they received a tax refund. There were no differences in tax filing behavior by race.

As previously mentioned, anti-poverty tools such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) strengthen household financial security and improve family wellbeing by mitigating environmental and economic conditions that place children at risk for experiencing ACEs.^{xxi,xxii} For tax year 2022, 55% of Year 3 survey participants claimed the EITC and 64% claimed the CTC. However, the proportion of survey participants who claimed the EITC and CTC tax credits differed by race. See Figure 9.

Figure 9. Tax Filing Behavior for 2022 Tax Year by Race



Interviewees who claimed federal tax credits discussed a variety of ways these credits were helpful to them and their families.

Federal tax credit awareness and claiming were explored more in depth with interviewees. Researchers asked all 12 interviewees if they were aware of federal tax credits such as the EITC and CTC. Nearly all interviewees reported being aware of these tax credits, with only two non-filer interviewees being unaware. Some reported awareness of only one type of credit, such as the CTC, and others were aware and had claimed multiple credits. Researchers asked how well filers understood these credits as they went through the process of filing, either with Foundation Communities or elsewhere. Most said that they understood these credits, with two specifying that Foundation Communities walked them through the details of claiming them. For those who filed but did not receive these tax credits, researchers asked about barriers to claiming such credits. One participant said it was because they did contract work, one said that it was because they were told they made too much money, and one said that because their family files with an Individual Tax Identification Number, they do not qualify for certain credits.

“I did not understand. I just went based off of the computer tellin’ me that I make too much based off what I got back.” – Interviewee

“Regarding the federal tax cuts, my husband has his federal ITIN number, so some tax cut credits do not count for him. He files as a head of household and doesn’t have a Social Security number, so many of the credits do not apply to him. For example, the only ones that applied back then were regarding the children, and that was it.” – Interviewee

For those who received federal tax credits, researchers asked how these credits were helpful to interviewees and their families. Interviewees discussed a variety of ways these credits helped their families, including helping them replace their car, buy food, provide for their children, build

savings, reduce debt, and catch up financially and reduce struggle, especially when unexpected expenses arose.

“The year that we had baby, our car broke down. We used that refund to get a car.” – Interviewee

“In February, when [my partner] could not work, it helped us buy food because we knew that money was there. So, it did help us a lot.” – Interviewee

“For Christmas, we were able to buy presents for the children. This benefited us because my husband’s work diminished significantly in November and December. That’s the way it helped us. We could buy things for the children that the children needed. That credit helped us a lot in that way.” – Interviewee

“Then, this past year, it’s going to be a year, their dad and I separated. When that did happen, I maxed out a lot of my credit cards. This year’s refund, I caught up to them a little bit. They just get spent left to right. I haven’t been able to slow down. I wanted to save at least half of it, but I haven’t been able to.” – Interviewee

How Families Filed

About one fourth of survey participants filed taxes through Foundation Communities, almost one third used an e-filing service, and just over one third paid a professional to do their taxes. Participants who identified as Latino/a/x were most likely to pay a professional.

For survey participants who filed, 23% filed through Foundation Communities, 7% used another free tax professional, 31% used an e-filing service, and 35% paid a professional to file their taxes. Participants who identified as White were significantly more likely to use Foundation Communities, participants who identified as Black were significantly more likely to use e-filing services, and participants who identified as Latino/a/x were significantly more likely to pay a professional. See Table 5.

Table 5. Tax Filing Method by Race/Ethnicity (Year 3)

Tax filing method	Black (n 26)	Latino/a/x (n 154)	White (n 58)	Other* (n 9)
Foundation Communities	4%	15%	57%	0%
Other free tax professional	8%	7%	7%	8%
Paid professional	23%	47%	10%	8%
E-filing	65%	28%	21%	67%
Other tax filing method**	0%	4%	5%	11%

* The percentage breakdown for the nine participants who selected another race or more than one race should be interpreted with caution due to the low sample size.

** Other tax filing methods include preparing their own taxes or having a family member file their taxes.

Of survey participants who paid a tax professional (n = 85):

- **85%** identified as **Latino/a/x**
- **66%** had a **high school degree or less** (vs. some college or a college degree)
- **34%** had a **household income that was \$25,000 or less**

Of survey participants who used Foundation Communities (n=104):

- **57%** identified as **White** and **40%** identified as **Latino/a/x**
- **36%** had a **high school degree or** (vs. some college or a college degree)
- **29%** had a **household income that was \$25,000 or less**

Interviewees were selected based on how they filed: four filed with Foundation Communities, four filed without Foundation Communities, and four did not file their taxes. Of the four who did not file with Foundation Communities, two used a paid professional, one used a free service recommended by the IRS, and one filed using someone they knew.

When asked if they felt confident with their method of filing, three of the four non-FC filers indicated they felt confident and found their method to be helpful, though one felt less confident in years past when their circumstances were more complicated. The fourth non-FC filer noted they did not feel confident with their method of filing, largely because it was hard to understand all the changes in tax law from year to year. The filing service they used did not answer their questions about these changes.

“During the pandemic, everything was different, but then post pandemic, all the rules changed, and it was just too much. I think it was just the change of shifting from the pandemic and how you were filing it and people were getting more money versus now. With all these changes, people are getting less money.” – Interviewee

Tax Refunds

The average refund amount for survey participants was between \$4,001 and \$4,500. The most frequently mentioned priorities for using tax refunds included groceries, rent, and credit card debt.

Filers were asked in the survey to select their top priorities for how they would use their tax refund.

**Top
priorities for
tax refund:**

- 47%** planned to purchase groceries/pay grocery bills
- 33%** planned to pay off credit card bills
- 31%** planned to use it toward rent
- 30%** planned to put it into savings
- 26%** planned to use it toward utility bills

Knowledge of Foundation Communities Tax Preparation Services

On the Year 3 survey, 64% of tax filers were familiar with Foundation Communities' tax preparation services compared to 50% of non-filers.

Foundation Communities provides free tax preparation services to help community members with low incomes prepare and file tax returns. These services are offered year-round at two locations that Foundation Communities owns, Prosper Center - North and Prosper Center - South. Free tax preparation services are also provided at additional community sites during tax season (January to April). During the 2023 tax season, those four additional sites included Wells Branch Recreation Center, Round Rock Serving Center, Southeast Health & Wellness Center, and Cepeda Public Library. Foundation Communities also offers a "drop off" option in which clients can access some or all of the tax preparation process virtually. Additionally, Foundation Communities promotes MyFreeTaxes, a free online self-preparation and filing option offered by United Way. In the Austin Families Year 3 Survey, both filers and non-filers were asked to indicate whether they were familiar with these services. More filers than non-filers were familiar with Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services, with 64% of filers familiar as compared to 50% of non-filers. As indicated below, the percent of filers familiar with Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services differed by race.

% of filers familiar with free tax prep services:

Overall, 64% of survey participants who filed were familiar with Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services. When examined by race:

*62% of **Black** families who filed were familiar with services*

*59% of **Latino/a/x** families who filed were familiar with services*

*79% of **White** families who filed were familiar with services*

Survey participants who were familiar were asked how they learned about these services. Of the 182 participants who answered this question, 42% selected two or more choices. The most common responses included ads on social media (32%), a family member or friend (27%), or a newsletter, email, or flyer (25%). Table 6 provides a summary of findings.

Table 6. How Survey Participants Learned of Foundation Communities' Tax Prep Services

How participants learned	%
I saw an ad on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	32%
I heard about it from a family member and/or friend	27%
I received a newsletter, email, and/or flyer	25%
I saw a yard sign, billboard, and/or bus sign	16%
A local organization that I am involved with recommended	13%
I received a text message	13%
I have used a Foundation Communities Prosper Center to file my taxes before	11%
I heard an ad on the radio and/or saw an ad on TV	7%
I heard about and/or attended community meeting(s)	6%
I heard about it at work	3%
Other*	2%
None of the above	12%

*Other responses included child's school, community college, a community event, and an acquaintance.

Knowledge about Foundation Communities' tax preparation services was also discussed in interviews. Of the eight interviewees who did not file with Foundation Communities (either non-filers or those who filed elsewhere), seven were aware of Foundation Communities tax preparation services and two had used these services in the past.

Interviewees heard about Foundation Communities tax preparation services in a variety of ways, including through another Foundation Communities program (such as housing), from family, from newspapers, and through receipt of public benefits. One interviewee recommended advertising the program in other low-income properties throughout Austin:

"I feel like more of the people that know about them are people that are in their property that live in Foundation Communities properties. I tend to believe that a lot of their clients are those people that live in them, and Austin surprisingly has a lot of low-income apartments or housing. It would be beneficial for them to try to outreach more to those properties so that they can be told and know that it's free and just advertise themselves a little bit more." — Interviewee

Perceptions and Experiences with Foundation Communities

All FC-filer interviewees reported satisfaction with Foundation Communities' tax preparation services and said they would use these services again in the future.

Three of the four interviewees who used Foundation Communities to file their taxes this year had filed with them for multiple years. All FC-filer interviewees and one non-filer interviewee who had used Foundation Communities to file their taxes in the past reported the services to be helpful. Similarly, these interviewees reported a positive experience with staff, stating that staff were kind, helpful, and knowledgeable. One Spanish-speaking interviewee mentioned that while

the intake staff they worked with spoke Spanish, other staff throughout the process did not, but that they were still able to file their taxes easily. FC-filer interviewees also reported that Foundation Communities helped them to understand the tax filing process, either by explaining the process as they went along, or by answering specific questions. These interviewees also stated that the timing and location of Foundation Communities tax preparation services were convenient. All interviewees who filed with Foundation Communities, either this tax year or in the past, said that they would utilize the tax preparation services again in the future.

“I understood it pretty well. They showed me just on the different lines what everything meant and what was being taken out and why and how much I would get back. They made it pretty easy to understand.” – Interviewee

Researchers asked interviewees who did not file with Foundation Communities (either non-filers or those who filed elsewhere) what, if any, barriers prevented them from utilizing Foundation Communities tax preparation services. Responses varied, with reported barriers including missing their scheduled appointment, filing too late or not having tax forms in time, being unsure about filing taxes, not knowing enough about Foundation Communities services, or using the same trusted person as in years past.

Researchers asked interviewees who either knew about or had used Foundation Communities tax preparation services if they were aware of the language line that Foundation Communities uses to help translate when there are not staff available who speak the clients' preferred language. Most interviewees were not aware of the language line, though one said that it would be beneficial for a family member. Researchers also asked those that filed with Foundation Communities, either this year or in the past, if the services were provided in their preferred language. English-speaking interviewees were always able to file their taxes with Foundation Communities in their preferred language, and Spanish-speaking interviewees either filed with a Spanish-speaking staff member or utilized a combination of Spanish-speaking and English-speaking staff. It should be noted that aside from bilingual intake staff, the Foundation Communities tax preparation program relies heavily on volunteers to support filing, and that it is difficult to recruit bilingual volunteers. It should also be noted that interviews were only conducted with participants in English and Spanish. In future surveys or focus groups, it may be worth asking program participants whose preferred language is not English about their experiences working with staff who do not speak their preferred language and, when applicable, about using the language line.

When asked what they thought would have been different if they had used Foundation Communities' tax preparation services, non-filer and non-FC filer interviewees said that it may have been easier, less stressful, saved them money, and that a refund (for one participant who did not file) would have been helpful. One non-filer said that they were confused about whether they should file, and that Foundation Communities may have helped them decide. Researchers also asked non-filers and non-FC filers whether they would consider using Foundation Communities' tax preparation services in the future. Nearly all said that they would, with one interviewee stating they would like more information about the services and another who was hesitant to share personal information with another entity.

“What kind of stops me too is, once I’m settled with someone, especially when it comes to this type of information, like sharing [Social Security numbers] and things like that, it makes me feel a little uncomfortable to go to someone new.” – Interviewee

Researchers asked all interviewees whether they would prefer to file their taxes with Foundation Communities by appointment or by same day walk-in. Nearly all interviewees said they would prefer an appointment for predictability in both the timing and the services they receive. One non-filer said they would prefer walk-in availability, explaining that they rely on others for transportation and would not want to use a ride if they ended up not needing to file.

Reasons For Not Filing

The most frequently cited reasons in the survey for not filing taxes for the 2022 tax year included not making enough money and not receiving a W-2.

Table 7. Reasons For Not Filing Taxes for the 2022 Tax Year (n = 42)

Reason for not filing	%
I did not receive a W-2 from my employer	24%
I am not required to file my taxes because I did not make enough money	21%
I did not know about free tax preparation services	19%
I would have liked to file my taxes, but I did not know how	17%
I did not think I would get a refund this year	17%
I worry if I file my taxes, I will do something wrong and get in trouble with the IRS	2%
Other	24%

**Other responses included not working, still planning to file, receiving SSDI or SSI, and forgetting to file*







Reasons for not filing varied across non-filer interviewees.

As previously mentioned, four interviewees did not file their taxes for the 2022 tax year. When asked why they decided not to file, interviewees mentioned they did not have time this year, they have complicated work circumstances, they were not sure if they should file, or they did not make enough income to file. Three out of the four non-filer interviewees had filed in the past and when asked what was different about past years, one interviewee said they had more time in the past and one said their work circumstances had changed since they last filed.

Comparing Non-Filers to EITC Claimers in Year 3

There were significant differences in income level, employment status, and education level for those who did not file their 2022 taxes and those who claimed their EITC.

Figure 10. EITC Claimers vs. Non-Filers on Income, Employment and Education

EITC Claimers	Year 3	Non-Filers
 84%	Household income was above \$15,000 in 2022	 36%
 80%	Employed at least part-time	 38%
 61%	Attended some college or had a college degree	 36%

CHANGES IN TAX FILING BEHAVIORS OVER TIME

There were no significant differences in the number of participants who filed taxes or claimed federal tax credits over the three years of this study.

The PACES project aims to increase claiming of the EITC and CTC among the Eastern Crescent community to improve a family’s financial security, which, over time, may promote protective factors against ACEs. However, there were no significant changes over time in filing taxes or claiming tax credits for participants in the Austin Families sample who completed all three surveys. See Table 8.

Table 8. Tax Filing Behavior Across Time (N = 242)

	% filed taxes	% claimed EITC	% claimed CTC	Significant change
2020 tax year (Y1)	86%	63%	70%	No
2021 tax year (Y2)	88%	60%	71%	No
2022 tax year (Y3)	87%	56%	63%	No

There are several factors that should be considered before drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the staff training and outreach on tax filing and tax claiming behavior. First, most participants did not interact directly with an organization that had staff trained. In Year 2, only 22% were involved in an organization where at least one staff member participated in the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training, and in Year 3, only 15% were involved in an organization where at least one staff member was trained. Moreover, staff who were trained represent only a portion of the staff who work within their organization. Even if families interacted with an

organization where at least one staff member was trained, they may not have directly interacted with a trained staff member. As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the training. More research is needed to look at the behaviors of families who directly interact with trained staff.

As most families did not directly interact with organizations where staff were trained, Foundation Communities may want to consider additional ways to recruit and train staff from the following organizations Austin Family Survey participants indicated they were involved with:

- City of Austin Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program
- Austin Achieve Public Schools
- Black Mamas ATX
- Breakthrough Central Texas
- CommUnity Care
- El Buen Samaritano
- Mainspring Schools
- United Way of Greater Austin
- VELA

About half of the families reported no involvement with organizations. While Foundation Communities used social media, earned media, tabling at community events, text messaging platforms, and highly visible public messaging (e.g., city bus ads) in the Eastern Crescent to encourage families to file, alternative ways to reach families and share information may be needed to impact tax filing and tax claiming behavior.

FAMILY WELLBEING

Parents who experience financial hardships, such as having a low income or living in poverty, are more likely to experience stress, depression, and relationship conflicts, which can make parenting more challenging.^{xxiii,xxiv} Financial insecurity also increases social experiences and conditions—such as frequent moves or experiencing food insecurity—that increase the risk of experiencing ACEs.^{xxv} The following section looks at factors related to family wellbeing, including financial hardship, housing stability, employment, income, benefits, childcare, health, relationships, and support for Year 3 survey participants. These categories were also reported by interviewees as common or frequent points of stress for their families.

Economic and Material Hardship

On the Year 3 survey, EITC claimers reported significantly lower levels of economic hardship compared to non-filers for the 2023 tax season. Overall, economic hardship was a common experience among survey participants and interviewees.

Survey participants were asked 20 questions about their experiences of economic hardship and wellbeing. The scores for each item were combined and summed to calculate an aggregate hardship score. Scores ranged from 0 to 45, with higher scores indicating more economic hardship. Overall, EITC claimers reported lower levels of perceived economic hardship compared to non-filers for the 2023 tax season (Year 3 survey). These findings should be

interpreted with caution as non-filers also had significantly lower income levels and were less likely to be employed than EITC claimers. See Table 9.

Table 9. Economic Hardship: Non-Filers vs. EITC Claimers (Year 3)

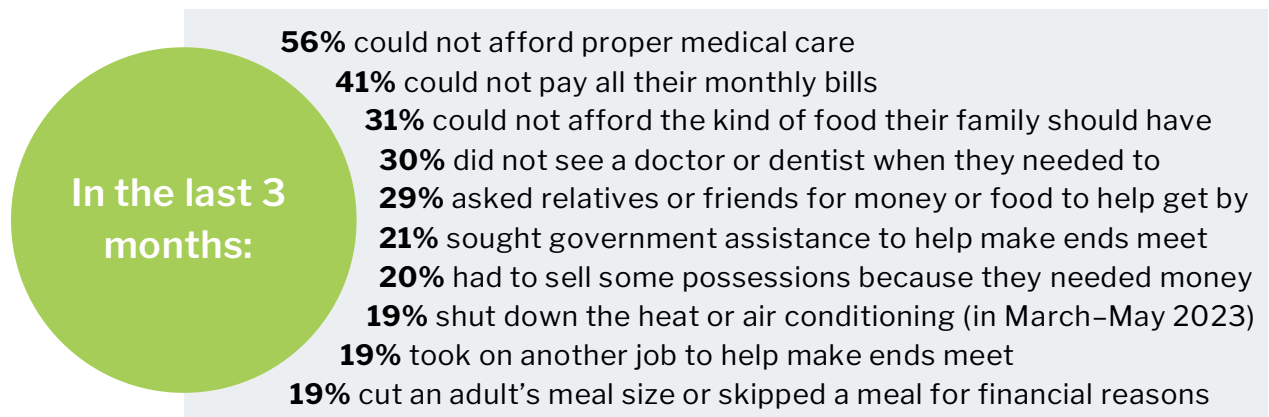
	Non filer		EITC		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Economic Hardship Score	24.8	10.16	20.0	8.15	3.09	188	0.002**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The Year 3 survey showed...

- **34%** of participants were at least somewhat worried about meeting their basic needs in the next three months
- **52%** of participants reported being short on money at the end of each month
- Participants who identified as White were significantly less likely to report being short on money (26%) compared to participants who identified as Black (84%) or Latino/a/x (56%)
- **64%** of non-filers reported being short on money, as compared to 52% of EITC claimers
- **1 in 3** participants indicated they did not have enough money for food in the past three months
- **67%** of families adjusted their livelihoods in some capacity to make ends meet
- **Non-filers** report more experiences of economic and material hardships, such as difficulty paying their monthly bills, as compared to EITC claimers

Of the Year 3 survey participants...



While most common stressors discussed in interviews are categorized in the below sections, other frequent stressors included access to food, unexpected costs like car repair, providing children with needed services such as therapy, and finding transportation for children. Most interviewees also mentioned experiencing general financial stress, with some specifying grocery costs, utilities bills, and difficulty building savings.

“Most of my paycheck usually goes to food, because it’s very expensive and with the kids being at home right now, you know since they are off from school. We try to go to the movies, but I try to take them on Tuesdays ‘cause that’s when it’s cheaper.” – Interviewee

Housing Stability

Most survey respondents were renters, over one third of whom were worried about being evicted in the next month. Approximately one fourth of families had experienced housing instability over the past three months.

Most of the Year 3 survey participants rented their home (61%). A smaller percentage of participants indicated they owned their home (20%), lived with family (12%), or lived in a house or condo owned by another family member (4%). The remaining 3% of participants reported living somewhere else (e.g., temporary housing, shelters, experiencing homelessness, recreational vehicle, etc.).

For participants who rented, 30% were “slightly” or “somewhat” worried about being evicted in the next month and 10% were “very” or “extremely” worried about being evicted.

Approximately 1 in 4 survey participants experienced some housing instability over the past three months:

- **16%** missed a rent or mortgage payment
- **5%** had to move in with other people even for a little while because of financial issues
- **4%** had to move to another house or apartment to save some money
- **2%** stayed at a shelter, in an abandoned building, an automobile, or any other place not meant for regular housing for at least one night

Housing concerns were also mentioned by one interviewee as a frequent point of stress for their family.

“I’m in an income-restricted apartment. Three months into our lease, they go up \$200 on my rent, and then here recently they went up another \$80. [...] That is a big stressor for me, because I don’t feel like I’m gonna be able to survive livin’ in Austin.” – Interviewee

Employment

Most survey participants reported being employed, with almost one third reporting they received no benefits. Participants also commonly reported job stress.

The majority of participants (86%) indicated that they were employed or that their partner was employed. When asked specifically about their own employment status, 51% of participants reported working full time while another 17% reported working part time. Fifteen percent were looking for employment and/or temporarily out of work, 11% were not working and not looking for employment, and 6% selected “other.” For those who selected “other,” explanations

included being the primary caregiver for a household member, typically for children; working as needed; being retired; or being sick or on disability.

Of those who were employed:

- **16%** worked more than one job
- **10%** worked 50 hours or more each week

Employment benefits varied among participants who were employed.

- **34%** received no benefits
- **52%** received health insurance while **31%** received dental insurance
- **48%** received vacation/paid time off
- **33%** received a retirement plan or pension
- **33%** received medical leave
- **27%** received paid sick leave
- **20%** received overtime pay

Participants who were employed rated statements regarding job stress based on how often they were true for them.

- **65%** participants were not always able to work hours/shifts that they needed to meet their family's needs
- **45%** of participants did not always know their work schedule two weeks in advance
- **32%** indicated their work schedule often or always causes extra stress on their family

When asked what common or frequent points of stressors their family experiences, four interviewees mentioned employment as a stressor. Specifically, these interviewees cited the inconsistency that comes with contract work, with either work being inconsistently available or not having paid sick leave to cover missed hours.

Additional Sources of Income and Benefits

Over half of participants reported utilizing children's Medicaid for their families, 40% reported using SNAP, and 33% reported using WIC.

Children's Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) were the top three sources of additional income and benefits that families received. Table 10 shows the percentage of families who received each type of support.

Table 10. Additional Sources of Income and Benefits (Year 3)

Benefits	N 294
Children's Medicaid	57%
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	39%
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	33%
Adult Medicaid	13%
Child Support	11%
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	6%
Housing Assistance/Housing Choice Voucher	6%
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	5%
Child Care Assistance/Subsidies	4%
Head Start/Early Head Start Services	3%
Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)	2%
Medicare	2%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	1%
Unemployment Benefits	1%
Veteran's Benefits	1%
Other*	1%
None	21%

*"Other" included Social Security survivors benefits and insurance through Healthcare.gov.

Public benefits were not specifically asked about during interviews; however, four interviewees discussed difficulty accessing or keeping public benefits—such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—as a stressor on their family.

“Right now, as of last month, they took my SNAP benefits away. That’s been a little tight financially.” — Interviewee

Childcare

Quality, affordable, and reliable childcare was a common struggle among survey families.

Affordable, quality childcare options are essential for working families, yet 42% of survey participants did not have any childcare arrangements and 32% of participants relied on a childcare arrangement with a relative (paid or unpaid). Other childcare arrangements included childcare centers (15%), afterschool programs (13%), public pre-K (10%), home-based childcare (8%), or Head Start (5%). Only 44% of participants with childcare felt very satisfied with their arrangements.

- **26%** reported they had to change their childcare arrangements and move to a new program or facility in the last 12 months

- **46%** of families reported they had to make at least one special childcare arrangement in the past month because their usual childcare arrangements were not available or fell through
- **38%** of participants who work indicated that it is often or always difficult to deal with childcare problems during working hours

Of families without childcare arrangements (n = 124), 31% indicated they would ideally want to have an arrangement. Families without childcare arrangements were asked about the reasons they did not have childcare, with the option to select more than one answer.

- **92%** of families could not afford the type of care they wanted
- **16%** did not like the quality of childcare in their area
- **5%** did not like the types of childcare in their area
- **5%** had bad experiences with childcare arrangements in the past

Caregiver Health and Wellbeing

Overall, survey participants who claimed the EITC reported better health and mental wellbeing than participants who did not file taxes.

When asked about their overall health:

- **6%** of participants rated their health as poor
- **32%** rated their health as fair
- **36%** rated their health as good
- **14%** rated their health as very good
- **12%** rated their health as excellent

There were also significant differences in perceived health for non-filers and EITC claimers, although the reason for these differences is unknown and may be related to other factors such as income and employment status. See Table 11.

Table 11. Perceived Health: Non-Filers vs. EITC Claimers

	Non filers	EITC	Test for differences
Would you say your health is...?	n= 41	n= 163	$p = 0.002$, Fisher's exact test**
Poor	17%	4%	The proportion of EITC claimers who reported excellent health was higher for those who claimed the EITC compared to those who did not file.
Fair	34%	26%	
Good	34%	33%	
Very Good	12%	18%	
Excellent	2%	20%	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Depression

Survey participants were asked a series of screening questions for potential depression. Possible scores on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-10 (CESD-10) range from 0 to 30, with higher scores representing greater degrees of depressed mood. To screen positive for depression, a participant would have to score a 10 or higher. The average score on the CESD-10 of non-filers ($M = 11.4$, $SD = 7.1$) was significantly higher than the EITC claimers' average score ($M = 8.6$, $SD = 5.9$), although the reason for these differences is unknown.

- Overall, 57% of non-filers screened positive for possible depression on the (CESD-10) compared to 37% of EITC claimers. This result was statistically significant.
- **8%** of participants reported they rarely felt happy (less than 1 day) over the past week while **29%** reported they felt happy all of the time (5–7 days)
- **6%** of participants reported they felt depressed all of the time (5–7 days) over the past week while **52%** reported they felt depressed rarely (less than 1 day).

Caregiver Relationship and Support

More than half of survey participants were married or living with a partner, and most participants reported quality relationships both with their partners and between their partners and their children.

When asked about their relationship status, 31% of survey participants indicated they were not in a current relationship, 48% indicated they were married, 14% indicated they were living with a partner, 6% indicated they were in a relationship but not living together, and 2% indicated they were dating. Three participants did not answer this question.

Quality of Relationship with Partner

Of the survey participants who were in a relationship ($n = 199$), most viewed their relationship favorably.

- **33%** viewed their relationship as excellent
- **27%** viewed their relationship as very good
- **27%** viewed their relationship as good
- **12%** viewed their relationship as fair
- **2%** viewed their relationship as poor

90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their partner:

- Expressed affection or love for them
- Encouraged or helped them do things that were important to them

Over 90% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that their partner:

- Tried to prevent them from seeing or talking with their friends or family
- Tried to prevent them from going to work or school
- Withheld money, made them ask for money, or took their money
- Insulted or criticized them for not taking good enough care of their child(ren) or home
- Pushed, grabbed, or shoved them

Quality of Partner's Relationship with Child(ren)

Participants were also asked to rate their partner's relationship with their children. Most viewed the relationship between their partner and their children as either good (23%), very good (28%) or excellent (41%). Seven percent of participants viewed their partner's relationship with their children as fair, and 2% indicated that the relationship was poor.

Partner's Financial Contribution

In terms of contributing financially to the family, 74% of participants indicated their partners contributed a lot, 21% indicated they contributed a little, and 5% indicated their partner did not contribute at all.

Family Protective Factors

Protective factors for survey participants varied across categories, but non-filers reported significantly fewer protective factors compared to EITC claimers.

Survey participants were asked to rate a list of statements on how much they felt the statement matched what they feel. The data reported below is based on the number of respondents who indicated the statement was "quite a lot like their life" or "just like their life."



Protective Factors:

- 46%** of participants felt the future looks good for their family
- 70%** of participants had things they did as a family that were special to them
- 70%** of participants have people in their life who believe in them
- 52%** of participants have no trouble finding someone to look after their kids on short notice
- 50%** of participants do not or rarely feel like they constantly have to tell their children "no" or "stop"

This study also included three subscales of the Protective Factors Scale (PFS; Counts et al., 2010) that measure family functioning/resiliency, nurturing and attachment, and social emotional support. Average scores for each subscale can range from 0 to 4. Higher scores on the Family Functioning/Resilience Subscale indicate more open communication within the family, and a greater ability to persevere or manage problems in times of crisis. Higher scores on the Social Emotional Support Subscale indicate higher levels of perceived informal support that helps provide for emotional needs. Lastly, higher scores on the Nurturing and Attachment Subscale indicate a higher level of emotional bonding and positive interaction between a parent and child.

EITC claimers scored significantly higher than non-filers on both the Family Functioning/Resiliency and Social Emotional Support Subscales, indicating more protective factors related to family functioning and support for EITC claimers. There was not a significant difference between EITC claimers and non-filers on the Nurturing and Attachment Subscale. Caution should be taken when interpreting these findings, as they only provide information about whether or not a difference exists, not why a difference exists.

Table 12. Family Protective Factors: Non-Filers vs. EITC Claimers

	Non filer		EITC		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Family Functioning/Resilience	2.4	0.96	2.8	0.80	2.87	190	0.005**
Social Emotional Support	2.1	1.03	2.8	0.91	4.16	189	<0.001**
Nurturing and Attachment	2.8	0.93	2.9	0.80	0.60	194	0.547

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Organizational Involvement

Half of the Year 3 survey participants were involved with or receiving services from local organizations, and these organizations varied across families.

Many organizations around Austin work to provide services to families. Survey participants were asked if they were involved with or receiving any services from local organizations. Half of the participants reported they were involved with or receiving services from at least one organization. See Table 13.

Table 13. Involvement with Organizations (N = 290)

Organization	n	%
CommUnity Care	60	21%
Austin Public Health- WIC program	59	20%
Any Baby Can	16	6%
Foundation Communities	15	5%
Communities in Schools (CIS) Care Coordination	10	3%
Austin Voices for Education and Youth	9	3%
Not involved in any organization	145	50%

Note: Organization with less than 3% participation included: Austin Achieve Public Schools, Autism Support Services, AVANCE-Austin, Big Brother Big Sister, Black Mamas ATX, Breakthrough, Caritas of Austin, Con Mi Madre, Friends of the Children-Austin, Giving Austin Labor Support (GALS), Jeremiah Program, LifeWorks, Mainspring Schools, Man in Me, Partners in Parenting, Strong Start, Todos Juntos Learning Center, United Way for Greater Austin, and Welcome Table.



Limitations

A major limitation of this study was that the Austin Families sample was a convenience sample of families. As the sample was not chosen through random selection, it may not fully represent the study population. Additionally, when the sample was first identified in Year 1, there were issues with fraudulent survey entries. While most of these were removed at the time, there were an additional 55 cases identified in Year 3. These cases were removed from the sample in Year 3 but had been included in earlier reports.

There are also some limitations to what can be drawn from survey findings, as they may not reflect the entire sample. Participants who completed the Year 3 survey were significantly different from those who did not complete it in terms of their education level, language spoken at home, and gender. There were also differences in education level and gender between those who completed all three surveys and those who did not. This makes it more difficult to generalize findings.

Interviewees were identified through the survey and selected based on their filing status and language. Although interviewees may have provided additional context for some of their decisions and experiences around tax filing and claiming, their experiences do not represent those of the entire sample.

When looking at race and ethnicity, some categories had to be combined into “Other” due to small numbers of individuals who fell into those categories. Ideally, researchers would have been able to analyze data for these categories individually but did not have an adequate sample size for each of these categories.

Lastly, the research design limits what can be said about cause and effect. Staff who received the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training significantly increased their referrals to families for tax preparation services at follow-up; however, these families may not have been included in the Austin Families Sample. On the Year 3 survey, only 15% of participants indicated they were involved with an organization that had at least one staff member who was trained. Moreover, staff who were trained represent only a portion of the staff who work within their organization. Even if families interacted with an organization where at least one staff member was trained, they may not have directly interacted with a trained staff member. As a result, it was not possible to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training in terms of how it impacts tax filing and tax claiming among families.

It is also worth noting limitations of the PACES project, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited the ability to reach staff to encourage training participation and clients to encourage utilization of free tax preparation services. Expanded eligibility for certain federal tax credits only in the 2021 tax year (but not other tax years included in the project) may have also impacted the outcomes assessed in this study.



Conclusions

STAFF SURVEYS

Staff reported that the training was valuable, and that it better equipped them to serve families by building awareness around ACEs and how to address them, including connecting families with financial supports through tax filing with Foundation Communities. Challenges to implementing what they learned included discomfort talking with clients about ACEs, uncertainty around employment or documentation status, and getting resources to clients in time for filing. Staff made several suggestions to improve upon or expand the training, such as providing materials to staff earlier or providing resources on unique filing situations or family circumstances.

There was no significant difference in ACEs knowledge for staff between the pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys, but knowledge was relatively high across all three time points. The training did have a significant impact on staff understanding of trauma and staff's ability to identify protective factors and promote resilience. The training also significantly increased staff knowledge about tax information such as EITC eligibility. Although there were no significant differences in knowledge about the relationship between taxes and ACEs, a high percentage of staff answered related questions correctly across all three time points. Staff awareness of free tax preparation services in the community also significantly increased, but there is still room for improvement in overall staff understanding of federal tax credits.

Staff also made significant progress in their confidence discussing tax preparation services and tax credits after the training. They were also significantly more likely to share information about tax preparation and tax credits with families and refer families to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services after the training.

In summary, the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training was impactful for staff, giving them a greater understanding of the connection between ACEs, poverty, and protective factors such as additional income. After completing the training, staff were more likely to share information about tax credits and tax preparation services. They were also more likely to refer clients to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services.

AUSTIN FAMILIES SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Findings from the Austin Families Year 3 Survey showed that over 85% of participants filed their taxes for the 2022 tax year, and most of those who filed received a tax refund. Over half of Year 3 survey participants claimed the EITC (55%) or CTC (64%); however, claiming tax credits varied significantly depending on participants' race. Participants who identified as White were more likely to claim tax credits compared to participants who identified as Black or Latino/a/x.

About one fourth of survey participants who filed taxes filed through Foundation Communities, almost one third used an e-filing service, and just over one third paid a professional. Participants who identified as Latino/a/x were most likely to pay a professional.

Over half of survey participants who filed taxes (64%) and half of participants who did not file (50%) indicated they were familiar with Foundation Communities' tax preparation services. When asked about how they learned about Foundation Communities' tax preparation services, survey participants most frequently reported seeing an ad on social media and hearing about services from a friend or family member. Interviewees who indicated they used Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services reported high levels of satisfaction with services and a desire to use their services again.

The most frequently cited reasons for not filing taxes in 2022 were not receiving a W-2 from their employer, not being required to file because they did not make enough money, and not knowing about free tax preparation services.

Consistent with the Year 1 and Year 2 surveys, the Austin Families Year 3 Survey also showed that EITC claimers had a significantly higher income level, were more likely to have attended college, and were more likely to have been employed part-time compared to non-filers. Economic hardship, housing instability, job stress, and childcare were common struggles among families who participated in the survey; however, EITC claimers reported significantly lower levels of hardship than non-filers across many of these categories. Quality, affordable, and reliable childcare was a common struggle among survey families, with less than half of survey participants feeling satisfied with their current childcare arrangements. About one third of survey participants without childcare indicated they would ideally want to have childcare but could not afford the type of childcare they would want for their child. Interviewees who claimed federal tax credits discussed the ways in which these credits were helpful, including managing overall expenses, reducing debt, and boosting savings.

In terms of protective factors such as family resilience and social emotional support, EITC claimers reported significantly greater protective factors than non-filers. Many families utilized resources such as Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC, and half of families were involved with or receiving services from local organizations. However, only 15% of survey participants were involved in an organization where at least one staff member had received the training.

In summary, findings indicate that the EITC is beneficial for families in reducing stressors and helping to build protective factors, and that free tax filing services such as those provided by Foundation Communities provides support for families in accessing these credits. It was not possible to determine whether the ACEs and Mitigating Factors Training impacted tax filing and claiming for families, as most families were not involved in organizations where staff were trained. Alternative methods of outreach or additional training for staff at organizations where families are involved may be needed to impact tax filing and tax claiming among low-income families in the Eastern Crescent of Austin. Additionally, families may need broader support when it comes to common family stressors such as financial hardship, housing instability, job stress, and childcare.



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Appendix A

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training Pre-Survey

You are invited to take this survey because you are a staff member of an organization participating in the Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors training. The survey will ask you about your understanding and knowledge of federal tax credits and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This survey is part of an evaluation study conducted by researchers at The University of Texas - Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) that seeks to understand the value of this training for professionals around Austin.

In total, we will ask you to take three short surveys: a pre-survey and post-survey today and a follow-up survey in the spring of 2023. The information you provide will inform Foundation Communities' ongoing efforts to improve the wellbeing of families and children in the Greater Austin area. Your answers will not be used to evaluate you or your organization. Your participation in the survey is **voluntary** and will not impact your position at your organization or your relationship with Foundation Communities or The University of Texas at Austin in any way. Your name will not be publicly linked to any of your responses, and all the information you provide will remain confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact our Research Director, Laura Marra at [email].

This survey should take about **10 minutes** to complete. We appreciate your honest and complete responses to all questions in this survey. If you complete both the pre-survey and post-survey today, your name will be entered into a **drawing for a \$15 gift card**. One participant from each training will be selected and notified within two weeks of their training.

Do you consent to participating in this survey?

- Yes, I consent to participating in this survey.
- No, I do not wish to participate in this survey.

Contact Info

Please provide the following information to allow us to match your pre-training survey and your post-training survey and to follow up with you in a few months. As a reminder, the information you provide in this survey will be kept confidential by the research team. Identifying information will not be publicly linked to any of your responses.

What is your first name? _____

What is your last name? _____

What is your email address? _____

What is your phone number? _____

Professional Background

What organization do you currently work for?

- AFSSA (Asian Family Support Services of Austin)
- Any Baby Can
- Austin Area Urban League
- Austin Child Guidance Center
- Austin Independent School District (AISD)
- Austin Voices for Education and Youth
- Austin Youthworks
- AVANCE-Austin
- Black Mamas ATX
- Black Women In Business
- Catholic Charities of Central Texas
- Central Texas Allied Health Institute
- Communities in Schools (CIS) of Central Texas
- Dress for Success Austin
- Foundation Communities
- Friends of the Children Austin
- Giving Austin Labor Support (GALS)
- Goodwill Central Texas
- Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA)
- Jeremiah Program
- LifeWorks
- Literacy Coalition of Central Texas
- Mainspring Schools
- Partners in Parenting
- PelotonU
- Pflugerville Independent School District (PfISD)
- Saint Louise House
- Skillpoint Alliance
- Todos Juntos Learning Center
- Welcome Table
- Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program
- Other organization -----
- I am self-employed
- I am not currently working
- Prefer not to say

For the purposes of this survey, we will refer to the families who participate in the programs or services provided by your organization as clients. Please answer the following questions about your daily work experience with clients.

In a typical month, how often do you...?

Directly interact with clients

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Direct low- and moderate-income families in Austin to other community resources that may benefit them

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Identify the needs of clients through formal assessments

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Identify the needs of clients informally, such as by talking with them while providing services

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Child Development and ACEs

We will be referring to adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, as potentially traumatic experiences in childhood that can later affect adulthood.

How familiar are you with the term ACEs?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Not at all familiar

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements about children and child development.

How well children do is determined by the natural traits and characteristics they are born with

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

A nurturing parent or caregiver can help a child overcome early adversity

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

How children respond to stress depends on their natural makeup

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

How well children do is determined by their environment

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about childhood trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Trauma experienced by children can often be prevented

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

A child who is exposed to chronic adversity cannot thrive in adulthood

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Additional household resources (i.e., income) can reduce parenting stress

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Children are not affected by their parents' level of stress

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

For families with low or moderate incomes, having a higher income would make their children less likely to experience trauma

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We would like to know how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relate to your professional practices. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I can identify factors in a family's life that are protective, or make it less likely that children experience trauma

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I can describe what trauma/ACEs are

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Part of my role in my organization is to reduce the likelihood that children experience trauma/ACEs

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Federal Tax Filing and Tax Preparation Services

As a reminder, we refer to the families who participate in the programs or services provided by your organization as clients. We understand that you may or may not work in a role that directly serves clients. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I know about **free tax preparation services** in the community that our clients could use

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **free tax preparation services** in the community with our clients

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I know about **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services with our clients

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I know about **federal tax credits** that our clients might be eligible for

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **federal tax credits** with our clients that they might be eligible for

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

During the 2022 tax season (January to June 2022), did you share information about **tax credits** (e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit) with any of your clients?

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply - I do not work directly with clients
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you share information about **tax credits** with? Please provide your best estimate.

-----clients

During the 2022 tax season (January to June 2022), did you share information about any **free tax preparation services** with any of your clients?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you share information about any [free tax preparation services](#) with? Please provide your best estimate.

_____clients

During the 2022 tax season (January to June 2022), did you direct any clients to [Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services](#)?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you direct to [Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services](#)? Please provide your best estimate.

_____clients

Have you personally ever used Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Knowledge of Trauma and ACEs

We would like to understand your knowledge about childhood trauma/ACEs and the effect that trauma can have on children. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

Children who experience trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), are more likely to experience which of the following?

- Learning problems
- Behavioral issues
- Early sexual activity
- All of the above

One population at higher risk for experiencing childhood trauma are children who have recently become involved with the child welfare system. What other populations could be at a higher risk for experiencing trauma? Select all that apply.

- Children from a household with a lower income
- Children who feel close to their parents
- Children with parents who experience high levels of stress
- Children who live in communities with high unemployment rates

Choose the words that BEST complete the following sentence:

_____ resulting in trauma can shrink a person's _____. This means that they have a greater tendency to become over or underwhelmed when experiencing stressful events.

- Negative perceptions / amygdala
- Conflict / attribution bias
- Misunderstandings / life expectancy
- Adverse experiences / window of tolerance

What is a connection between toxic stress and ACEs?

- Exposure to adverse experiences excessively activates a body's stress response called toxic stress, which can negatively impact a child's healthy development
- Toxic stress occurs when a child is exposed to carcinogens that change the brain structure of a child, resulting in a higher likelihood of ACEs
- Toxic stress and ACEs do not have long term impacts

Which of the following situations are examples of acute trauma? Select all that apply.

- Physical assault
- Natural disasters
- Patterns of domestic violence
- Motor vehicle accident
- Repeated sexual abuse

The following list includes both risk and protective factors associated with ACEs. Determine which are [protective](#) factors. Select all that apply.

- Parental stress
- Supportive family environments
- Community violence
- A parent's history of ACEs
- Policies that strengthen economic support for families
- Subsidized childcare

We would like to better understand your knowledge of federal tax credits. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

True or False:

To qualify for the [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#), everyone claimed on the federal tax return must have a [valid social security number](#) (i.e., be a US citizen or documented noncitizen/migrant).

- True
- False

How are tax credits related to ACEs?

- Families who file their taxes are more likely to be from higher-income families, who are less likely to experience ACEs
- Tax credits provide families with additional income that may reduce the likelihood of experiencing ACEs
- Families with lower incomes may end up owing the federal government more money when they file their taxes, increasing the likelihood of a child experiencing ACEs

Demographics

This is the final page of the survey. The following questions are asked to enable comparisons of responses across individuals and groups to understand the different experiences of people with different identities. We believe it is important to ask about these intersecting identities in case individuals from certain groups are having substantively different perceptions and experiences compared to individuals from other groups. Any information you provide will not be shared outside the research team. Data will be aggregated and presented so that no individuals will be identifiable from the results that are shared.

Have you taken this training previously?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What is your highest level of education?

- Less than high school
- High school degree or equivalent (GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree (e.g., MA, JD, PhD)
- Other, please describe: _____
- Prefer not to say

Which of the following gender categories best describes how you self-identify?

- Man
- Non-Binary
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to say

**Which of the following ethnic or racial categories best describes how you self-identify?
Select all that apply.**

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latino/a/x or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern/North African
- Native American, Indigenous American, Alaska Native or First Nations
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe: -----
- Prefer not to say

What is your age category?

- Less than 25 years old
- 25 - 34 years old
- 35 - 44 years old
- 45 - 54 years old
- 55 - 64 years old
- 65 years old or older
- Prefer not to say

We will send the follow-up survey to [email entered previously]. Please verify that this email is correct. If this is not the email you would like us to use, please enter the correct one below.

- Yes, this email address is correct
- No, please use this one instead: -----

Thank you! Please submit your survey.

Appendix B

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training Post-Survey

Thank you for participating in Foundation Communities' *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training*! This **post-survey** is part of an evaluation study conducted by researchers at The University of Texas - Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) that seeks to understand the value of this training for professionals around Austin.

We appreciate your honest and complete responses to all of the questions in this survey. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time. Your participation will not impact your position at your organization or your relationships with Foundation Communities and The University of Texas at Austin in any way. Your name will not be publicly linked in any of your responses, and all of the information you provide will remain confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact our research director, Laura Marra at [email].

This survey should take about **10 minutes** to complete. If you have completed the pre and post survey, your name will be entered into a **drawing for a \$15 gift card**. If your name is selected, you will be notified within the next two weeks. We value your feedback and thank you for taking the time to provide us with this important information.

We will also follow up with you in Spring 2023 to understand how you have retained and integrated the information from the training into your professional practice. If you are attending this training to obtain a continuing education credit (CEU), we strongly encourage your participation in this survey.

Do you consent to participating in this survey?

- Yes, I consent to participating in this survey.
- No, I do not wish to participate in this survey.

Contact Info

Please provide the following information to allow us to match your pre-training survey and your post-training survey and to follow up with you in a few months. As a reminder, the information you provide in this survey will be kept confidential by the research team. Identifying information will not be publicly linked to any of your responses.

What is your first name? _____

What is your last name? _____

What is your email address? _____

What is your phone number? _____

Child Development and ACEs

We will be referring to adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, as potentially traumatic experiences in childhood that can later affect adulthood.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements about children and child development.

How well children do is determined by the natural traits and characteristics they are born with

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

A nurturing parent or caregiver can help a child overcome early adversity

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

How children respond to stress depends on their natural makeup

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

How well children do is determined by their environment

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about childhood trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Trauma experienced by children can often be prevented

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

A child who is exposed to chronic adversity cannot thrive in adulthood

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Additional household resources (i.e., income) can reduce parenting stress

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Children are not affected by their parents' level of stress

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

For families with low or moderate incomes, having a higher income would make their children less likely to experience trauma

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We would like to know how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relate to your professional practices. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I can identify factors in a family's life that are protective, or make it less likely that children experience trauma

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I can describe what trauma/ACEs are

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Part of my role in my organization is to reduce the likelihood that children experience trauma/ACEs

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Federal Tax Filing and Tax Preparation Services

As a reminder, we refer to the families who participate in the programs or services provided by your organization as clients. We understand that you may or may not work in a role that directly serves clients. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I know about **free tax preparation services** in the community that our clients could use

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **free tax preparation services** in the community with our clients

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I know about **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services with our clients

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I know about **federal tax credits** that our clients might be eligible for

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I feel confident discussing **federal tax credits** with our clients that they might be eligible for

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

This training stressed the importance of ACEs and getting your clients to file their federal tax return to claim refundable tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). We are interested in learning how this information applies to your work.

Share information about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) with your clients

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Share information about the Child Tax Credit (CTC) with your clients

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Share information about Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services with your clients

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Direct your clients to Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Take action(s) to reduce the risk of children experiencing ACEs

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Share information learned today with colleagues

Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	N/A
-------------	--------	----------	---------------	-----

Knowledge of Trauma and ACEs

We would like to understand your knowledge about childhood trauma/ACEs and the effect that trauma can have on children. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

Children who experience trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), are more likely to experience which of the following?

- Learning problems
- Behavioral issues
- Early sexual activity
- All of the above

One population at higher risk for experiencing childhood trauma are children who have recently become involved with the child welfare system. What other populations could be at a higher risk for experiencing trauma? Select all that apply.

- Children from a household with a lower income
- Children who feel close to their parents
- Children with parents who experience high levels of stress
- Children who live in communities with high unemployment rates

Choose the words that BEST complete the following sentence:

_____ resulting in trauma can shrink a person's _____. This means that they have a greater tendency to become over or overwhelmed when experiencing stressful events.

- Negative perceptions / amygdala
- Conflict / attribution bias
- Misunderstandings / life expectancy
- Adverse experiences / window of tolerance

What is a connection between toxic stress and ACEs?

- Exposure to adverse experiences excessively activates a body's stress response called toxic stress, which can negatively impact a child's healthy development
- Toxic stress occurs when a child is exposed to carcinogens that change the brain structure of a child, resulting in a higher likelihood of ACEs
- Toxic stress and ACEs do not have long term impacts

Which of the following situations are examples of acute trauma? Select all that apply.

- Physical assault
- Natural disasters
- Patterns of domestic violence
- Motor vehicle accident
- Repeated sexual abuse

The following list includes both risk and protective factors associated with ACEs. Determine which are protective factors. Select all that apply.

- Parental stress
- Supportive family environments
- Community violence
- A parent's history of ACEs
- Policies that strengthen economic support for families
- Subsidized childcare

We would like to better understand your knowledge of federal tax credits. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

True or False:

To qualify for the [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#), everyone claimed on the federal tax return must have a [valid social security number](#) (i.e., be a US citizen or documented noncitizen/migrant).

- True
- False

How are tax credits related to ACEs?

- Families who file their taxes are more likely to be from higher-income families, who are less likely to experience ACEs
- Tax credits provide families with additional income that may reduce the likelihood of experiencing ACEs
- Families with lower incomes may end up owing the federal government more money when they file their taxes, increasing the likelihood of a child experiencing ACEs

Training Feedback

This is the final page of the survey. Any feedback you provide in these last three questions will be summarized and used to improve the Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors training. We appreciate you taking the time to answer each question.

What are ways the Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors training will impact your work with families?

What challenges do you anticipate facing as you incorporate what you learned in this training into your work?

What other topics related to ACEs or tax filing / tax credits that were not covered in this training would you like to learn more about?

Thank you! Please submit your survey.

Appendix C

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training Follow-Up Survey

You are invited to take this survey because you participated in Foundation Communities' *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training* on [date]. This survey is part of an evaluation study conducted by researchers at the The University of Texas - Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) that seeks to understand the value of this training for professionals around Austin.

We appreciate your honest and complete responses to all of the questions in this survey. Your participation in this survey is **voluntary** and you may stop participating at any time. Your participation will not impact your position at your organization or your relationships with Foundation Communities and The University of Texas at Austin in any way. Your name will not be publicly linked in any of your responses, and all of the information you provide will remain confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact our research director, Laura Marra at [\[email\]](#).

This survey should take about **10 minutes** to complete and will ask you about any impact the training may or may not have had as well as your understanding of federal tax credits and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Once you complete the survey, your name will be entered into a **drawing for a \$50 gift card**. If your name is selected, you will be notified by the end of July. We value your feedback and thank you for taking the time to provide us with this important information.

Do you consent to participating in this survey?

- Yes, I consent to participating in this survey.
- No, I do not wish to participate in this survey.

Professional Background

What organization do you currently work for?

- AFSSA (Asian Family Support Services of Austin)
- Any Baby Can
- Austin Area Urban League
- Austin Child Guidance Center
- Austin Independent School District (AISD)
- Austin Voices for Education and Youth
- Austin Youthworks
- AVANCE-Austin
- Black Mamas ATX
- Black Women In Business
- Catholic Charities of Central Texas
- Central Texas Allied Health Institute
- Communities in Schools (CIS) of Central Texas
- Dress for Success Austin
- Foundation Communities
- Friends of the Children Austin
- Giving Austin Labor Support (GALS)
- Goodwill Central Texas
- Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA)
- Jeremiah Program
- LifeWorks
- Literacy Coalition of Central Texas
- Mainspring Schools
- Partners in Parenting
- PelotonU
- Pflugerville Independent School District (PfISD)
- Saint Louise House
- Skillpoint Alliance
- Todos Juntos Learning Center
- Welcome Table
- Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program
- Other organization -----
- I am self-employed
- I am not currently working
- Prefer not to say

Were you working for [organization] when you completed this training on [date]?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Has your position changed since you completed this training on [date]?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

For the purposes of this survey, we will refer to the families who participate in the programs or services provided by your organization as clients. Please answer the following questions about your daily work experience with clients.

In a typical month, how often do you...?

Directly interact with clients

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Direct low- and moderate-income families in Austin to other community resources that may benefit them

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Identify the needs of clients through formal assessments

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Identify the needs of clients informally, such as by talking with them while providing services

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
-------	-----------	-------	--------

Child Development and ACEs

We are interested in your thoughts about children and child development. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements.

How well children do is determined by the natural traits and characteristics they are born with

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

A nurturing parent or caregiver can help a child overcome early adversity

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

How children respond to stress depends on their natural makeup

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

How well children do is determined by their environment

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

We are interested in your understanding of childhood trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Trauma experienced by children can often be prevented

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

A child who is exposed to chronic adversity cannot thrive in adulthood

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

Additional household resources (i.e., income) can reduce parenting stress

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

Children are not affected by their parents' level of stress

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

For families with low or moderate incomes, having a higher income would make their children less likely to experience trauma

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

We would like to know how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relate to your professional practices. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I can identify factors in a family's life that are protective, or make it less likely that children experience trauma

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I can describe what trauma/ACEs are

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

Part of my role in my organization is to reduce the likelihood that children experience trauma/ACEs

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

Federal Tax Filing and Tax Preparation Services

As a reminder, we refer to the families who participate in the programs or services provided by your organization as clients. We understand that you may or may not work in a role that directly serves clients. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I know about **free tax preparation services** in the community that our clients could use

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I feel confident discussing **free tax preparation services** in the community with our clients

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I know about **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I feel confident discussing **Foundation Communities'** free tax preparation services with our clients

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I know about **federal tax credits** that our clients might be eligible for

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

I feel confident discussing **federal tax credits** with our clients that they might be eligible for

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

During the 2023 tax season (Fall 2022 through today), did you share information about **tax credits** (e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit) with any of your clients?

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply - I do not work directly with clients
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you share information about **tax credits** with? Please provide your best estimate.

_____clients

During the 2023 tax season (Fall 2022 through today), did you share information about any **free tax preparation services** with any of your clients?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you share information about any **free tax preparation services** with? Please provide your best estimate.

_____clients

During the 2023 tax season (Fall 2022 through today), did you direct any clients to [Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services](#)?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

About how many clients did you direct to [Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services](#)? Please provide your best estimate.

_____clients

Have you personally ever used Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Knowledge of Trauma and ACEs

We would like to understand your knowledge about childhood trauma/ACEs and the effect that trauma can have on children. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

Children who experience trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), are more likely to experience which of the following?

- Learning problems
- Behavioral issues
- Early sexual activity
- All of the above

One population at higher risk for experiencing childhood trauma are children who have recently become involved with the child welfare system. What other populations could be at a higher risk for experiencing trauma? Select all that apply.

- Children from a household with a lower income
- Children who feel close to their parents
- Children with parents who experience high levels of stress
- Children who live in communities with high unemployment rates

Choose the words that BEST complete the following sentence:

_____ resulting in trauma can shrink a person's _____. This means that they have a greater tendency to become over or overwhelmed when experiencing stressful events.

- Negative perceptions / amygdala
- Conflict / attribution bias
- Misunderstandings / life expectancy
- Adverse experiences / window of tolerance

What is a connection between toxic stress and ACEs?

- Exposure to adverse experiences excessively activates a body's stress response called toxic stress, which can negatively impact a child's healthy development
- Toxic stress occurs when a child is exposed to carcinogens that change the brain structure of a child, resulting in a higher likelihood of ACEs
- Toxic stress and ACEs do not have long term impacts

Which of the following situations are examples of acute trauma? Select all that apply.

- Physical assault
- Natural disasters
- Patterns of domestic violence
- Motor vehicle accident
- Repeated sexual abuse

The following list includes both risk and protective factors associated with ACEs. Determine which are [protective](#) factors. Select all that apply.

- Parental stress
- Supportive family environments
- Community violence
- A parent's history of ACEs
- Policies that strengthen economic support for families
- Subsidized childcare

We would like to better understand your knowledge of federal tax credits. Please answer to the best of your ability. It is okay if you need to guess the answer to these questions.

True or False:

To qualify for the [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#), everyone claimed on the federal tax return must have a [valid social security number](#) (i.e., be a US citizen or documented noncitizen/migrant).

- True
- False

How are tax credits related to ACEs?

- Families who file their taxes are more likely to be from higher-income families, who are less likely to experience ACEs
- Tax credits provide families with additional income that may reduce the likelihood of experiencing ACEs
- Families with lower incomes may end up owing the federal government more money when they file their taxes, increasing the likelihood of a child experiencing ACEs

Training Feedback

This is the final page of the survey. Any feedback you provide in these last three questions will be summarized and used to improve the Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors Training. We appreciate you taking the time to answer each question.

How has the *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mitigating Factors* training impacted your work with families?

What challenges have you encountered when talking to families about filing their federal tax return?

Please describe any feedback you would like to share with Foundation Communities or the evaluation team.

Thank you! Please submit your survey.

Appendix D

Austin Families Year 3 Survey

Foundation Communities, in partnership with United Way for Greater Austin, has contracted with The University of Texas at Austin - Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) to conduct the Austin Families Study to better understand the social and economic wellbeing of families in the Austin area. The Austin Families Study is a three-year study that asks you to complete a survey each year. **You are being asked to complete the Austin Families Year 3 Survey** because you completed the Year 1 Survey last year. This survey will ask you questions about your financial security, access to tax refunds, access to other public benefits, and your overall health and wellbeing.

This survey should take between **30-35 minutes** to complete. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect you or your family's ability to receive any services from Foundation Communities, United Way, or any community partner organization. All of your information and responses will be kept confidential. We will not share your individual answers with anyone outside of the research team.

As a thank you for your participation, you will be sent a **\$20 gift card** for completing the survey. You will also be entered into a **drawing to win an additional \$100 gift card**. Only one survey entry per household will be allowed.

We value your feedback and thank you for taking the time to complete all the questions in the Austin Families Year 3 Survey by **June 20, 2023**. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our Research Director, Laura Marra, at [email].

Would you like to participate in the Austin Families Year 3 Survey?

- Yes
- No

Eligibility

We would like to ask you three questions to make sure you are still eligible to participate in this survey. Please answer each question to the best of your ability.

What was your [legal marital status](#) on December 31, 2022?

- Married
- Not Married

Select the number of children who are younger than age 20 that you consider as dependents for whom you have primary physical custody.

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more
- I have no children younger than 18

Earned income generally means any money received from wages, salaries, tips, unemployment benefits, other taxable employee pay, and net earnings from self-employment.

Please indicate your and your spouse's total earned income between January 2022-December 2022. [Married]

- No income was earned (\$0)
- Between \$1-\$49,000*
- More than \$49,000*

**The income level is adjusted to \$55,000 for two children and \$59,000 for three children*

Please indicate your total earned income between January 2022-December 2022. [Not married]

- No income was earned (\$0)
- Between \$1-\$43,000*
- More than \$43,000*

**The income level is adjusted to \$49,000 for two children and \$53,000 for three children*

[If eligible] Based on the information you provided, you are eligible to take the Austin Families Year 3 Survey.

First, we will ask you for some contact information, and then the survey will start. This survey will take you about 30 minutes to finish. You can take this survey in more than one sitting. All your progress will automatically be saved, and you can click your survey link to pick up where you left off.

Contact Information

We will use the following contact information to send you a gift card, follow-up with you if there are any gift card issues and reach out to you about next year's survey. **Please be as accurate as possible when entering your contact information.**

First name: _____
Last name: _____
Email address: _____
Phone number: _____

Please provide a long-standing and permanent mailing address in case we need to reach you or if there are any issues sending your gift cards. If you anticipate moving, you may think about putting down the mailing address of a close relative or friend.

Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____
Zip Code: _____

We intend to email you an [electronic gift card](#) that will arrive in your inbox. Are you comfortable receiving your gift card by email?

- Yes, an electronic gift card is fine
- No, please mail me a physical gift card

We will be emailing your gift card to the following email address: [\[email address\]](#)

Is this the best email address?

- Yes, please email my gift card to this email address
- No, please email my gift card to this email address instead: _____

We will be mailing your gift card to this mailing address: [\[mailing address\]](#)

Is this the best address?

- Yes, please use this mailing address
- No, please use the following mailing address instead: _____

Would you like to be considered for a small discussion group to share more about your and your family's experiences living in the Austin area?

- Yes
- No

Survey

We would like to learn more about your household's income and tax filing practices. Remember, your responses to this survey are confidential and will not be shared. This survey is not affiliated with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or any other federal government agency.

The first set of questions are about your earnings and income. If you are legally married, please combine your and your spouse's earnings. Your total earned income on your federal tax return is the sum of any wages, salaries, and tips from your W-2, plus unemployment benefits, other taxable employee pay, and net earnings from self-employment.

Please indicate your (and your spouse's) total earned income between January 2022-December 2022. Can you tell me if it was...

- Less than \$5,000
- \$5,001 to \$7,500
- \$7,501 to \$10,000
- \$10,001 to \$12,500
- \$12,501 to \$15,000
- \$15,001 to \$17,500
- \$17,501 to \$20,000
- \$20,001 to \$22,500
- \$22,501 to \$25,000
- \$25,001 to \$27,500
- \$27,501 to \$30,000
- \$30,001 to \$32,500
- \$32,501 to \$35,000
- \$35,001 to \$37,500
- \$37,501 to \$40,000
- \$40,001 to \$42,500
- \$42,501 to \$45,000
- \$45,001 to \$47,500
- \$47,501 to \$50,000
- \$50,001 to \$52,500
- \$52,501 to \$55,000
- \$55,001 to \$57,500
- \$57,501 to \$60,000
- More than \$60,000

Tax Returns

Did you (or your spouse) file a federal tax return for income that you earned in 2022 (January 2022-December 2022)?

- Yes
- No

If participant filed taxes:

To the best of your knowledge, did you receive a refund after filing your tax return?

- Yes
- No

Approximately how much money did you receive as a tax refund this year?

- \$1 to \$500
- \$501 to \$1,000
- \$1,001 to \$1,500
- \$1,501 to \$2,000
- \$2,001 to \$2,500
- \$2,501 to \$3,000
- \$3,001 to \$3,500
- \$3,501 to \$4,000
- \$4,001 to \$4,500
- \$4,501 to \$5,000
- \$5,001 to \$5,500
- \$5,501 to \$6,000
- \$6,001 to \$6,500
- \$6,501 to \$7,000
- \$7,001 to \$7,500
- \$7,501 to \$8,000
- \$8,001 to \$8,500
- \$8,501 to \$9,000
- \$9,001 to \$9,500
- \$9,501 to \$10,000
- \$10,001 to \$13,000
- \$13,001 to \$15,000
- More than \$15,000

Please select your **top three priorities on how you will be using your tax refund:**

- Put it into savings
- Vacation
- Recreation / entertainment
- Share money with family members
- Purchase groceries / pay grocery bills
- Pay off a bank loan
- Credit card bills
- Medical bills
- Pay off personal loans
- Rent
- Utility bills
- Other bills
- Car payments
- Purchase or repair a vehicle
- House repairs / maintenance
- Purchase household furnishings (ex: furniture, major appliances)
- Moving expenses
- Tuition/school expenses
- Child care bills
- Child summer care / afterschool care
- Purchase clothing for a child
- Purchase school supplies for a child
- Purchase clothing for self
- Other, please explain: _____

Foundation Communities has a free Tax Help Program to help people file a federal tax return. These free tax preparation services are online as well as at six locations (Prosper South at IH-35, Prosper North at Airport Blvd, Round Rock Public Library, Montopolis Recreation Center, Goodwill Community Center, and Turner Roberts Recreation Center).

Are you familiar with Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?

- Yes
- No

We are trying to share information about Foundation Communities Prosper Center's free tax filing services with the community.

Which of the following have you seen or experienced this year (2023)? Select all that apply.

- A local organization that I am involved with recommended getting tax help from a Prosper Center
- I saw a yard sign, billboard, and/or bus sign
- I heard an ad on the radio and/or saw an ad on TV
- I received a newsletter, email, and/or flyer
- I received a text message
- I heard about and/or attended community meeting(s)
- I saw an ad on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- I heard about Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services from a family member and/or friend
- I heard about Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services at work
- I have used a Prosper Center to file my taxes before
- Other (specify): _____
- None of the above

Did you use Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services to file your 2022 federal tax return?

- Yes
- No

How did you file your 2022 tax return?

- I used another Volunteer Income Tax Assistant (VITA) site
- I used a free tax professional
- I used a paid chain tax store (ex: H&R Block, Jackson Hewitt)
- I used tax software to file online (ex: Turbo Tax)
- I used a local paid tax professional
- I completed the paperwork myself and mailed my return
- I don't know what I used to file my taxes
- Other (please specify) _____

If participant did not file taxes:

What were some reasons for not filing your 2022 tax return? Select all that apply.

- I did not receive a W-2 from my employer
- I am not required to file my taxes because I did not make enough money
- I did not know about free tax preparation services
- I worry that if I file my taxes, I will do something wrong and get in trouble with the IRS
- I would have liked to file my taxes, but I did not know how
- I did not think I would get a refund this year
- Other (please specify) _____

Foundation Communities has a free Tax Help Program to help people file a federal tax return. These free tax preparation services are online as well as at six locations (Prosper South at IH-35, Prosper North at Airport Blvd, Round Rock Serving Center, Wells Branch Recreation Center, Cepeda Public Library, and Southeast Health and Wellness Center). **Are you familiar with Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?**

- Yes
- No

We are trying to share information about Foundation Communities Prosper Center's free tax filing services with the community. **Which of the following have you seen or experienced this year (2023)? Select all that apply.**

- A local organization that I am involved with recommended getting tax help from a Prosper Center
- I saw a yard sign, billboard, and/or bus sign
- I heard an ad on the radio and/or saw an ad on TV
- I received a newsletter, email, and/or flyer
- I received a text message
- I heard about and/or attended community meeting(s)
- I saw an ad on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- I heard about Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services from a family member and/or friend
- I heard about Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services at work
- I have used a Prosper Center to file my taxes before
- Other (specify): _____
- None of the above

Tax Credits

Below is a list of some common federal tax credits that many individuals can receive. For each credit, please select the option that is most true for you.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

- I received this tax credit when I filed my 2022 tax return
- I received this tax credit in the past, but NOT for the tax year 2022
- I have never received this tax credit
- I have never heard of this tax credit

Child Tax Credit (CTC)

- I received this tax credit when I filed my 2022 tax return
- I received this tax credit in the past, but NOT for the tax year 2022
- I have never received this tax credit
- I have never heard of this tax credit

Child and Dependent Care Credit

- I received this tax credit when I filed my 2022 tax return
- I received this tax credit in the past, but NOT for the tax year 2022
- I have never received this tax credit
- I have never heard of this tax credit

Between July 2022 and December 2022, did you or anyone in your household receive a **monthly “Child Tax Credit” payment, that is, an advance payment from the expansion of the child tax credit as part of the Federal Government’s 2021 American Rescue Plan? *Please report ‘yes’ if you received the payment as a paper check or direct deposit.***

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

If received CTC: How much were your monthly Child Tax Credit payments?

- Less than \$150 per month
- \$150 to \$199 per month
- \$200 to \$249 per month
- \$250 to \$299 per month
- \$300 to \$349 per month
- \$350 to \$399 per month
- \$400 to \$449 per month
- \$450 to \$499 per month
- \$500 to \$549 per month
- \$550 to \$599 per month
- \$600 to \$649 per month
- \$650 to \$699 per month
- \$700 to \$749 per month
- \$750 to \$799 per month
- \$800 to \$849 per month
- \$850 to \$899 per month
- \$900 or higher per month
- I'm not sure

Economic Circumstances

We would now like to learn more about your ability to make ends meet and employment.

Below is a list of some common sources of income and benefits. Please tell us if you are currently receiving any of the following:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Unemployment Benefits
- Veteran's Benefits
- Child Support
- Child Care Assistance/Subsidies
- Head Start/Early Head Start Services
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Children's Medicaid
- Adult Medicaid
- Medicare
- Housing Assistance/Housing Choice Voucher
- Other (please specify) _____
- None of the above

In the next three months, how worried are you that your family will experience bad times such as poor housing or not having enough food?

- Not at all worried
- Slightly worried
- Somewhat worried
- Very worried
- Extremely worried

In the next three months, how worried are you that your family will have to do without the basic things that your family needs?

- Not at all worried
- Slightly worried
- Somewhat worried
- Very worried
- Extremely worried

Have you set aside emergency or rainy-day funds that would cover your expenses for three months in case of sickness, job loss, economic downturn, or other emergencies?

- Yes
- No

The next set of questions are going to ask you about your circumstances in the last three months. These three months are between April and June of 2021. **Think back over the past three months. Generally, at the end of each month, did you end up with...**

- More than enough money left
- Some money left
- Just enough money left
- Somewhat short of money
- Very short of money

Please think about how you felt about your family's economic situation over the past three months. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

We had enough money to afford the kind of home we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford the kind of clothing we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford the kind of furniture or household appliances we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford the kind of car we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford the kind of food we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford the kind of medical care we should have

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to pay all our monthly bills

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to afford leisure and recreational activities

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

We had enough money to treat our kid(s) to a special meal, a little gift, or a special outing

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

In the **last three months**, has your family made any of the following adjustments because of financial need? Select all that apply.

- Shut down the heat or air conditioning to save money even though it made the house/apartment uncomfortable
- Did not go to see a doctor or dentist when needed to save money
- Asked relatives or friends for money or food to help get by
- Added another job to help make ends meet
- Sought government assistance to help make ends meet
- Sold some possessions because we needed the money (even though we really wanted to keep them)
- Cut my or another adult's meal size or skipped a meal because there wasn't enough money for food
- Cut my child(ren)'s meal size or skipped a meal because there wasn't enough money for food
- We have not made any of these adjustments

Have any of the following occurred in the **past three months**...? Select all that apply.

- We have missed a rent or mortgage payment
- We had to move in with other people even for a little while because of financial problems
- We have stayed at a shelter, in an abandoned building, an automobile, or any other place not meant for regular housing, even for one night
- We had to move to another house or apartment to save some money
- None of these have occurred in the past three months

What is your **current** housing situation?

- Rent my apartment or house
- Live with family or friends who rent, and I contribute part of the rent
- Live with family or friends who rent, but I do not pay rent
- Own my own home
- Live in a house or condo owned by another family member
- Live in temporary housing or a group shelter
- Experiencing homelessness
- Other (please specify) _____

How worried are you about being evicted in the **next month**?

- Not at all worried
- Slightly worried
- Somewhat worried
- Very worried
- Extremely worried

Think back between **January 2022-December 2022**, was there ever a time when you were without health insurance?

- Yes
- No

What about your child(ren)? Was there ever a time between **January 2022-December 2022** when your **children** were without health insurance?

- Yes
- No

Employment

Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- Working full time
- Working part-time
- Looking for employment
- Temporarily out of work, laid off, or furloughed
- Not working and not seeking employment
- Other (please specify) _____

What is your partner's current employment status? If you do not have a partner, please select "not applicable."

- Working full time
- Working part-time
- Looking for employment
- Temporarily out of work, laid off, or furloughed
- Not working and not seeking employment
- Other (please specify) _____
- Not applicable

If employed:

Do you currently work more than one job?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how many jobs do you currently have?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

Between all of your jobs, how many **hours per week** do you **usually** work altogether? Please round to the nearest whole hour.

- 0-4 hours
- 5-14 hours
- 15-24 hours
- 25-34 hours
- 35-39 hours
- 40-49 hours
- 50+ hours

We refer to your primary job as the one at which you work the most hours. Does your primary job offer any of the following? Select all that apply.

- Paid sick leave
- Paid parental leave
- Vacation time/ paid time off
- Pension/ retirement plan
- Medical leave
- Health insurance
- Dental insurance
- Overtime pay
- None

Please tell me how true each of the following statements are.

Where I work, I know my work schedule at least two weeks in advance

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

I am able to work the hours that I need to meet my family's needs

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

Where I work, I am able to work shifts (weekends, evenings, nights, weekdays) that fit my family's needs

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

My shift and work schedule cause extra stress for my child(ren) and me

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

Where I work, it is difficult to deal with child care problems during working hours

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

In my work schedule, I have enough flexibility to handle family needs

Always true	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
-------------	------------	----------------	------------

Child Care

We would like to know more about your children and the care arrangements you have made for them. Qualifying dependents are children who you can claim on a federal tax return. A child is your dependent if they...

1. Live with you for more than 6 months out of the year
2. Are related to you by blood, adoption, or fostering through a government or private agency

Please answer the following questions ONLY about the children in your care that meet these two above criteria.

Please select the number of dependents you care for that are **under age 6.**

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

Please select the number of dependents you care for that are **age 6 through 17:**

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

Please select the number of dependents you care for that are **age 18**:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

We are interested in the types of care arrangements your children use. Which of the following do your children use on a regular basis? Select all that apply.

- We do not use any care arrangements
- Head Start
- Childcare center
- Public pre-k
- Afterschool program
- Unpaid arrangement with a relative (grandparent, brother, sister)
- Paid arrangement with a relative (grandparent, brother, sister)
- Unpaid care in a private home (regular sitter, neighbor)
- Paid care in a private home (regular sitter, neighbor, child care)

If participant has care arrangements:

Approximately how many **days in the past month did you have to make special arrangements because your usual care arrangements for your children were not available or fell through?**

Please include times when your care providers were sick or unavailable due to a holiday or vacation.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

In the last 12 months, how many times have you had to switch your child(ren)'s care arrangements and move to a new program/facility?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

In general, how satisfied are you with your children's current care arrangements?

- Very dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Very satisfied

You have indicated that none of your children participate in any care arrangements on a regular basis. Ideally, would you like to have your child(ren) participate in a type of care arrangement?

- Yes
- No

If no child care arrangements:

Below are a few reasons why families cannot participate in different types of care arrangements.

What are the reasons your children are not participating in any type of care arrangement? Please select all that apply.

- We cannot afford the type of care we want
- We do not like the types of care arrangements in our area
- We do not like the quality of the care arrangements in our area
- We have had bad experiences with care arrangements in the past
- Other, please explain:

Parental Health and Wellbeing

The next set questions ask about your mental and physical health, your disciplining practices for your children, and your relationship with a partner to better understand your wellbeing and how you feel about your family life. As a reminder, you may skip a question or withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses are confidential. We will never publicly associate your name with any of your responses.

How old are you?

_____years

Would you say your health is...?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

Do you have problems, such as keeping a job or getting along with family and friends, because of alcohol or drug use?

- Yes
- No

About how satisfied are you with your life overall?

- Very dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Very satisfied

Below is a list of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate **how often you have felt this way during the **past week** by checking the appropriate box for each question.**

Rarely or none of
the time
(less than 1 day)

Some or a little of
the time
(1-2 days)

Occasionally or a
moderate amount
of time (3-4 days)

All of the time
(5-7 days)

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me
2. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing
3. I felt depressed
4. I felt that everything I did was an effort
5. I felt hopeful about the future
6. I felt fearful
7. My sleep was restless
8. I was happy
9. I felt lonely
10. I could not "get going"

Please tell me the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from raising a family

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

For each of the following, mark the response that most closely matches how you feel.

The future looks good for our family

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

In my family, we take time to listen to each other

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

There are things we do as a family that are special to us

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

For each of the following, mark the response that most closely matches how you feel.

I have people who believe in me

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

I have someone in my life who gives me advice, even when it's hard to hear

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

When I am trying to work on achieving a goal, I have friends who support me

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

When I need someone to look after my kids on short notice, I can find someone I trust

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

I have people I trust to ask for advice

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

For each of the following, mark the response that most closely matches how you feel.

My children misbehave just to upset me

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

I feel like I'm always telling my kids "no" or "stop"

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

I have frequent power struggles with my kids

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

How I respond to my children depends on how I'm feeling

Not at all like
my life

Not much like
my life

Somewhat
like my life

Quite a lot
like my life

Just like my
life

Child Discipline

Children sometimes do things that are wrong or disobey their parents. We'd like to now ask you about how you discipline your children.

Please indicate **how frequently you did the following** in the **past three months** in response to your **child's behavior**. If you have multiple children, please indicate how often you did the following responses to any of your children.

I explained to my child(ren) why something they did was wrong.

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

I spanked my child(ren).

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

I took away privileges from them.

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

I put my child(ren) in "time-out" or sent them to their room (ex: grounded them).

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

I shouted, yelled, or lost my temper at my child(ren).

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

Relationship Status

Before going further, we would like to know your current relationship status. Are you...

- Married
- Living with a partner
- In a relationship, but not living together
- Dating
- Not currently in a relationship

If in a relationship:

These next few questions are about your relationship with your **current** partner.

In general, would you say that your relationship with your partner is...

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

What kind of parent to your children do you feel that your current partner is?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

In general, how much would you say that your partner contributes financially to your household?

- Not at all
- A little
- A lot

Children sometimes do things that are wrong or disobey their caregiver. In the **past three months, how often has your partner spanked any of your children?**

- This has never happened
- This has happened but not in the past three months
- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 20+ times
- This does not apply to me because of my child's age

Now, think about how your partner behaves toward you. For each statement you read, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

They are fair and willing to compromise when we have a disagreement

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They express affection or love for me

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They insult or criticize me or my ideas

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They encourage or help me to do things that are important to me

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They try to keep me from seeing or talking with my friends or family

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They try to prevent me from going to work or school

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They withhold money, make me ask for money, or take my money

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They insult or criticize me for not taking good enough care of the child(ren) or my home

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They push, grab, or shove me

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They listen to me when I need someone to talk to

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

They really understand my hurts and joys

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Since your **oldest child** was born, please indicate the number of partners you have had, including your current partner

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

Demographics

We have just a few more general questions about you and your family.

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

What is your date of birth? (mm/dd/yyyy) _____

What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary
- Other (please specify) _____

What is the highest degree or year of regular schooling that you have completed? Please select one.

- No formal schooling
- 1st-8th grade
- 9th-12th grade
- High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
- Some college
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree or higher (BA, BS, AB, etc.)

Which of the following racial/ethnic groups best describes you? Please select all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White, non-Hispanic
- I would prefer not to say

What is the zip code for your current residence?

- 78617
- 78653
- 78702
- 78721
- 78723
- 78724
- 78741
- 78744
- 78752
- 78753
- 78754
- 78758
- Other, please specify: _____

Many organizations around Austin work to provide services to families. Are you **involved with or receiving any services** from any of these organizations? Select all that apply.

- I am not involved in any Austin organizations
- United Way For Greater Austin
- Foundation Communities
- Any Baby Can
- Austin Achieve Public Schools
- Austin Public Health- WIC program
- Austin Voices for Education and Youth
- AVANCE-Austin
- Black Mamas ATX
- Communities in Schools (CIS) Care Coordination
- CommUnity Care
- Friends of the Children-Austin
- Giving Austin Labor Support (GALS)
- Literacy Coalition of Central Texas
- Mainspring Schools
- Partners in Parenting
- Saint Louise House
- Todos Juntos Learning Center
- Welcome Table, Inc.
- Other (please specify) -----

You have reached the end of the survey.

Appendix E

Austin Families Year 3 Interview Guide

Introduction

Foundation Communities has contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing to evaluate its PACES program, which aims to help more families claim tax credits through free tax filing, to give them a financial boost to help them raise their children. As part of this evaluation, TXICFW is conducting interviews with families who live in the Austin area and who have participated in the Year 3 Austin Families Survey to learn more about their experiences and the impact of the program. Interviews will be audio recorded so that they can be transcribed and analyzed by our research team, but all of your information and responses will be stored securely on a password protected server to which only the TXICFW research team has access. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect your or your family's ability to receive any services from Foundation Communities.

Client Interview Questions

Introduction and Background

1. To start, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?
 - a. What kinds of things do you and your family like to do together?
 - b. What are common or frequent points of stress in your family? (let them answer and use the prompts/examples below if needed)
 - i. Job security
 - ii. Childcare
 - iii. Housing
 - iv. Money (general – paying for bills and groceries)
2. We know there are many reasons why people file or do not file taxes each year and that these circumstances can change year to year. Did you file taxes for the 2022 tax year? (Can also phrase it as “file taxes in 2023”)
 - a. If yes, did you file with Foundation Communities free tax preparation services?

Tax Filing and Tax Credits

Non-Filers

1. Can you tell me a little more about why you didn't file taxes for the 2022 tax year? (Can also phrase it as “file taxes in 2023”)
 - a. Have you ever filed taxes in the past?
 - i. If so, what was different about the year(s) you filed?
 - ii. If so, how did you file in the past?
2. Foundation Communities provides free tax preparation services through the Prosper Tax Help Program. What, if anything, have you heard about these services?

- a. What prevents you from using Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?
 - i. (If language is mentioned) Were you aware of the language line, a translation service that Foundation Communities uses to support clients in filing their taxes?
 - b. What do you think would be different if you had used Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?
 - c. What, if anything, would make you want to consider using their services in the future?
 - i. Would you prefer to work with Foundation Communities by appointment, or be able to "walk-in" and file your taxes on the same day?
3. Federal tax credits available to families such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, or the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit are available to many families based on income and family size. What, if anything, have you heard about these federal tax credits?
- a. Have you or your family received these credits in the past?
 - i. If so, what was different about the year(s) you received these credits?

Filers – With Foundation Communities

1. Can you tell me a little more about using Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services to file your taxes?
 - a. How helpful was this service?
 - b. What was your experience like with the Foundation Communities staff?
 - c. How well did you understand the process of filing taxes as you worked with the program?
 - i. Tell me about how Foundation Communities addressed any questions that came up during tax filing.
 - d. How did the timing and location of the program work for you and your family?
 - e. Were the services provided in your preferred language?
 - i. Were you aware of or did you utilize the language line, a translation service that Foundation Communities uses to support clients in filing their taxes?
 - f. Would you utilize these services again in the future?
 - i. Would you prefer to work with Foundation Communities by appointment, or be able to "walk-in" and file your taxes on the same day, even if you had a slightly longer wait time?
2. Federal tax credits available to families such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, or the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit are available to many families based on income and family size. What, if anything, have you heard about these federal tax credits?
 - a. How well did you understand these tax credits and how to claim them as you worked with Foundation Communities on tax filing?
 - b. Did you receive any of these federal tax credits this year as part of your refund?
 - i. If not, what got in the way of receiving these credits?

- ii. If so, tell me about the ways in which these credits were or were not helpful to you and your family.

Filers – Not with Foundation Communities

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you filed your taxes this year?
 - a. Did you pay someone to prepare your taxes, did you utilize a free service, or did you prepare your own taxes?
 - b. Did you feel confident about your tax filing?
 - i. If so, what made you feel confident about your method of filing?
 - ii. If not, what did you feel uncertain about?
 - c. (If used another individual or service) How helpful was the individual or service you used in helping you understand the tax filing process?
2. Foundation Communities provides free tax preparation services through the Prosper Tax Help Program. What, if anything, have you heard about these services?
 - a. What prevents you from using Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?
 - i. (If language is mentioned) Were you aware of the language line, a translation service that Foundation Communities uses to support clients in filing their taxes?
 - b. What do you think would be different if you had used Foundation Communities' free tax preparation services?
 - c. What, if anything, would make you want to consider using their services in the future?
 - i. Would you prefer to work with Foundation Communities by appointment, or be able to "walk-in" and file your taxes on the same day?
3. Federal tax credits available to families such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, or the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit are available to many families based on income and family size. What, if anything, have you heard about these federal tax credits?
 - a. How well did you understand these tax credits and how to claim them as you filed your taxes?
 - b. Did you receive any of these federal tax credits this year as part of your refund?
 - i. If not, what got in the way of receiving these credits?
 - ii. If so, tell me about the ways in which these credits were or were not helpful to you and your family.

Closing Thoughts

1. Is there anything else about taxes, tax credits, tax filing, or Foundation Communities that you'd like to share?

Appendix F

Year 3 Outreach Efforts to Key Partners

A summary of year 3 outreach efforts to key partner organizations who participated in the dissemination of the baseline survey are provided in the table below:

Key Partner	Outreach Efforts in Year 3
American Youthworks	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Any Baby Can	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Austin Independent School District (Parent Support Specialists)	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed. Hosted FC Tax Help in two virtual informational sessions.
Austin Public Health- WIC	Tax season flyers were shared with WIC Community Engagement Coordinator 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed. Shared FC Tax Help services information on their private Facebook group.
Austin Achieve Public Charter Schools	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed. Shared Tax Help information on their parent resource webpage and via ClassDojo messaging platform.
Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY)	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
AVANCE-Austin	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Black Mamas ATX	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Communities in Schools (CIS) of Central Texas	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
CommUnity Care	CommUnity Care's Southeast Health and Wellness Center was a tax host site during the 2023 tax season. Tax season flyers were provided and tabling was conducted at the center twice during the 2023 tax season.
Friends of the Children Austin	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.

Giving Austin Labor Support (GALS)	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Goodwill	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Housing Authority of the City of Austin	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed. Flyers delivered to their housing properties in Austin.
LifeWorks	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Mainspring Schools	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
Saint Louise House	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.
United Way of Greater Austin	Tax season flyers shared with partner 3 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed. UWATX staff shared Tax Help flyers during their outreach community events. UWATX lent their Bright by Text mass-texting platform to message subscribed partners. Presentations were made during the tax season to their coalition groups.
Welcome Table	Tax season flyers shared with partner 2 times during the 2023 tax season. Outreach toolkit emailed.

While not a key partner organization, outreach was also made to El Buen Samaritano during the 2023 tax season: flyers were shared three times, an outreach toolkit was emailed, and a virtual zoom tax help workshop was co-hosted.



The University of Texas at Austin
**Texas Institute for
Child & Family Wellbeing**
Steve Hicks School of Social Work