

THE BOLD WAY: SEEDING CHANGE, BUILDING POWER

YEAR 1 RJEF GRANTEE HIGHLIGHTS, APRIL 2026

About the Racial Justice Equity Fund

The **Racial Justice Equity Fund (RJEF)** is a participatory, trust-based philanthropic initiative investing in community-rooted organizations advancing racial justice, community power, and systems change to improve outcomes for children and families. Grounded in an intersectional approach, RJEF provides flexible funding that enables organizations to respond to urgent needs, strengthen capacity, and drive long-term change.

We envision a world where children from prenatal to age five, their families, and communities flourish surrounded by strong families, safe homes, healthy environments, and caring communities. To support these conditions, RJEF invests across areas including reproductive justice, early education, childcare, healthcare, housing, food, economic inclusion, birth equity, immigrant rights, and environmental justice.

Introduction

This collection of grantee highlights reveal something deeper than a collection of programs. It is a portal into what becomes possible when community organizations have the stability, trust, and resources to address what matters most.

Grantees are meeting families where they are, providing immediate, tangible support that addresses urgent needs and builds trust that no institutional systems cannot easily replicate. At the same time, they are doing the slower, harder work of shifting the conditions, policies, and systems that determine whether children and families can truly thrive.

This work is the product of sustained, flexible investment that gives organizations the runway to act beyond the crisis in front of them. Ultimately, these highlights show that community-rooted organizations, when adequately resourced, are not just service providers, but architects that make long-term well-being possible.

Learn More

For a deeper look at RJEF's work and findings:

- Full Evaluation Report: ecfunders.org/rjef
- Executive Summary: ecfunders.org/rjef

For funders interested in learning more, aligning resources, or exploring co-investment opportunities, please contact RJEF Director Leng Leng Chancey at lengleng.chancey@ecfunders.org.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHTS

These grantee highlights reveal something deeper than a collection of programs, but a portal into what becomes possible when community organizations have the stability, trust, and resources to work on issues that matter most.

On one hand, grantees are meeting families where they are at by providing the immediate, tangible support that address urgent need and builds the kind of trust that no institution can easily replicate. Secondly, those same organizations are doing the slower, harder work of shifting the conditions, policies, and systems that determine whether children and families have a genuine opportunity to thrive and not just survive. It is the product of sustained, flexible investment that gives organizations the runway to think and act beyond the crisis in front of them. What these highlights ultimately demonstrate is that community-rooted organizations, when adequately resourced, are not just service providers but architects of the conditions that make long-term well-being possible.



A STORY OF COMMUNITY CARE FROM THE START

Asheboro Latinx Services (ALS) understands that children’s well-being begins long before birth, shaped by the stability and support surrounding their families. By supporting parents and caregivers during pregnancy and early childhood, ALS ensures that children enter the world with love, safety, and stability, laying the foundation for lifelong well-being. These conditions are not abstract but an essential reality for young children to thrive. In Asheboro, ALS represents a trusted anchor organization that provides a source of care, connection, and belonging for Latinx families. That trust is built over time through consistent, culturally appropriate services and programs that are marked by systemic gaps and cultural isolation. They ensure that no parent navigates these early moments alone and every child is welcomed into a beloved community.

Organization Overview

ALS is a community-based organization serving the Latinx community in Asheboro and surrounding rural areas of North Carolina. In a region where language access is limited and many families live with fear related to immigration enforcement, ALS has become a trusted place families call first.

Founded in 2022, the organization began as volunteer-led. For nearly three years, Executive Director Tania Jimenez served as a volunteer or part-time. With RJEF support, she was finally able to step into the role full-time and something she described as one of the biggest celebrations of the year. “At the beginning of the year... I was really scared,” she shared about the political climate and funding uncertainty. Since ALS received RJEF funding, she said, “I feel relieved... I’ve been feeling amazing.”

The organization’s mission is to provide basic health services, legal and social counseling, and to advocate for equal rights and equitable access to services for Latinx individuals and families. ALS has become a center for families navigating healthcare systems, legal challenges, and social services.

Rooted in community trust and care, ALS supports families navigating healthcare, housing, schools, immigration concerns, and crisis situations. They meet families where they are at, driving them to appointments, buying diapers and food, translating at meetings, and showing up in moments of fear like ICE raids.



Community baby showers strengthen healthy, dignified, and community-supported child-rearing.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

In a year marked with fear and uncertainty, ALS grew in its staff and organizational capacity and increased their direct services.

Key accomplishments include:

- Provided immediate crisis response such as purchasing diapers, formula, food, and winter clothing for newly arrived families who “literally don’t have anything.”
- Paid for rides to medical appointments and urgent care visits.
- Hosted approximately 10+ community baby showers and visited mothers at the hospital or home after birth to provide continued support.
- Created wellness spaces for mothers, including yoga and meditation gatherings and a traditional temazcal postpartum healing ceremony.
- Supported families facing crisis situations, including providing emergency hotel stays for women experiencing abuse and responding to community calls when immigration enforcement activity increased.
- Brought families to school board and city council meetings with interpretation equipment so they can speak and understand proceedings.
- Brought an Executive Director on as full time staff after 3 years of volunteer and part-time work.
- Invested in its three staff members. This included new computers and equipment, professional coaching for leadership development, trainings and professional certifications, paid time off for staff wellness and English classes to strengthen service delivery.



ECONOMIC INCLUSION



SELF-DETERMINATION



AFFIRMING IDENTITIES

**“IT’S BEEN AMAZING
BECAUSE WE’RE
BUILDING THIS
COMMUNITY. WE
HAVE THE POWER TO
MAKE CHANGES.”**

TANIA JIMENEZ



Community baby showers provide needed joy, care and hope amid economic hardships and the pain of family separation caused by immigration raids

A STORY OF STATEWIDE POWER BUILDING

Black Child Development Institute–Ohio (BCDI–Ohio) shows what becomes possible when organizations center families in shaping their own future. At the heart of BCDI–Ohio’s approach is centering people most affected by inequitable systems as stakeholders. Families are shaping policy priorities, community leaders are influencing systems, and cross-sector partners are aligning around the needs of Black and Brown children. Over time, this work is helping to build a future that ensures a successful future for all children in Ohio. BCDI–Ohio is strategic in their efforts to solve issues that impact Black and Brown children through an inter-sectional lens, from child care to environmental justice.

Organization Overview

Across Ohio, Black and Brown children face persistent gaps in access to safe housing, maternal health care, early learning, and culturally affirming resources. Families report challenges ranging from lead exposure to limited access to quality child care and early childhood supports. Since 2017, BCDI–Ohio has served as a bridge between community and policy, listening directly to families and turning their experiences into action.

Their comprehensive network of organizations and community stakeholders seek to cultivate and implement equitable systems to support positive outcomes for Black and Brown children. While their mission is prenatal to age 18, they are particularly focused on the importance of policy change in the PN-5 area including child care, birth equity, home visiting, etc.



Convening bringing community voices directly to policy spaces.

With support from RJEF, BCDI–Ohio conducted statewide listening sessions with parents and caregivers, capturing the realities families face and translating those insights into a community-informed policy agenda. This work led to the release of a statewide report (featured in Zero to Three State of Babies Report 2026), the strengthening of a Prenatal-to-Three coalition, and hosting convening at the Ohio Statehouse bringing community voice directly into policy spaces.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

For BCDI–Ohio, RJEF support arrived at a pivotal moment. The funding allowed the organization to pause, strengthen its team, and build capacity to expand its work across the state. As Executive Director, Gloria Blevins, reflected, “Growth and having a team with expertise and dedication to the mission has allowed our organization to flourish throughout the state.”

Key accomplishments include:

- Reached up to 1,875 young children and 1,050 parents and caregivers statewide.
- Hosted 18 community baby showers engaging over 530 families with maternal health education, essential baby supplies, and connections to ongoing family support.
- Trained 270 educators statewide on trauma-informed care, equity, and culturally responsive practices
- Advancing lead screening and prevention efforts by co-chairing a Cleveland-based lead screening initiative, partnering with hospital systems and housing to expand access to testing and reach residents in subsidized housing.
- Conducted statewide listening sessions with parents and caregivers, documenting challenges ranging from lead exposure to maternal health access and translating these experiences into a statewide report with policy recommendations.
- Launched a Power Building Coalition that brings together parents, caregivers, community leaders, and policy advocates to elevate the voices of historically disinvested communities.
- Convened early childhood leaders and advocates at the Ohio Statehouse to strengthen collaboration through the Prenatal-to-Three coalition.
- Continued expanding from a primarily regional/Cleveland-based organization to a statewide early childhood policy advocacy organization, elevating the needs of Black and Brown families across Ohio.
- Strengthened financial infrastructure and completed the organization's first audit.
- Supported staff leadership development, training, and strategic planning to prepare for the organization's next phase of statewide growth.



“RJEF IS A FOUNDATION THAT CAME AT THE RIGHT TIME WHEN THE WORLD WAS FLIPPED UPSIDE DOWN.”

GLORIA BLEVINS





BCDI WI staff and board members with NBCDI Founder Dr. Evelyn Moore supporting Black children and their families.

BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE–WISCONSIN / WISCONSIN

A STORY OF CORE STRENGTH

Black Child Development Institute–Wisconsin (BCDI–Wisconsin) represents what becomes possible when organizations are trusted with unrestricted resources to build sustainably. Today, families are walking into a dedicated space, and staff can respond to what their community needs. Over time, this infrastructure growth extends beyond BCDI’s expansion. BCDI–Wisconsin documents the patterns of unmet need, names the systemic failures driving them, and brings that evidence into policy spaces with credibility and moral authority. They are shaping policy conversations that determine what are the most pressing needs in the community from Paid Family Leave to literacy. BCDI–Wisconsin ensures Black children and families across Wisconsin have greater access to the resources they need to thrive.

Organization Overview

Before BCDI–Wisconsin had a physical office, families would meet with staff wherever space was available, often at fast food restaurants or local eateries. Like many grassroots organizations with



BCDI attend the 2025 MOMS Symposium sharing resources and information

limited budgets, BCDI-Wisconsin prioritized investing resources in doing everything they could to support Black children and their families instead of paying for a physical office. RJEF support allowed BCDI-Wisconsin to invest in what it already knew was needed.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

RJEF funding helped BCDI-Wisconsin move from operating with limited infrastructure to positioning the organization for the next stage of growth. Their investments were very tangible including paid staff with benefits, a physical office where families and partners can gather and receive resources, and back-end systems needed for BCDI-Wisconsin to grow. Executive Director, Wanda Montgomery shared, “we have never in the history of our organization had full-time staff.”

Key accomplishments include:

- Continuing literacy outreach, including distributing books and hosting parent learning opportunities.
- Hosting a public annual community event that brought families in, increased membership, and helped the organization report back to the community in its own voice.
- Expanding partnerships across health systems and community institutions, and contributing to statewide coalitions focused on prenatal-to-three priorities.
- Securing dedicated office space so families and partners have a place to connect. Increasing responsiveness simply by having staff available daily from 8:30 to 4:30 from Monday through Friday at the new office.
- Strengthening financial infrastructure, including completing two audits.
- Building formal operational systems including financial policies, HR policies, insurance coverage, and strategic planning.
- Hiring and sustaining full-time staff for the first time in the organization’s history creating consistent capacity to respond, coordinate, and deliver work.
- Adding a full-time administrative services manager with benefits.



“RJEF HAS TAKEN THE PAIN AND THE BURDEN OUT OF RECEIVING MONEY—MONEY THAT ALLOWS YOU TO BE WHO YOU ARE, AND NOT WHO SOMEBODY WANTS YOU TO BE.”

WANDA MONTCOMERY



Black ECE co-founders stand proudly for language justice

BLACK CALIFORNIANS UNITED FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION / CALIFORNIA

A STORY OF BUILDING POWER AND VISIBILITY

Over the past year, Black Californians United for Early Care and Education (BlackECE) translated RJEF support into major organizational growth, program expansion, and field-building impact that directly advanced its vision for a culturally affirming early childhood education system in California. BlackECE has not only grown as an organization but has established itself as a key driver of systems change by shaping educator practice, public narrative, and policy advocacy. BlackECE's impact story is one of creating space, building power, and shifting narratives within early childhood systems for Black Californian children and families. Established during the pandemic, the organization created a platform where Black early educators and families could speak directly about their experiences and define solutions on their own terms.

While continuing to navigate the challenges of organizational growth and long-term sustainability, BlackECE represents a critical force in California's ECE landscape, demonstrating that centering Black children, families and early educators is essential to achieving an early care and education system we all deserve.

Organization Overview

BlackECE is a statewide, Black-led coalition advancing racial justice in early care and education through policy and systems change. Inspired in the summer of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and founded in 2022, BlackECE emerged in response to California's lack of attention to the specific needs of Black children, families, and early care and education providers. Led by Founder and

Executive Director Keisha Nzewi, BlackECE centers Black children, families, and the Black ECE workforce, ensuring their experiences and needs are reflected in policy decisions shaping early childhood systems.

BlackECE brings together advocates, civil rights organizations, researchers, university faculty, nonprofit leaders, early educators, caregivers, providers, families, and community-based organizations. The coalition is organized around a 10-point policy agenda designed to serve more than 490,000 Black children across California, building on prior advocacy while advancing equity-focused, reparative policy solutions.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

During its RJEF grant period, BlackECE strengthened its role as a leading voice for Black children and early educators in California. RJEF funding supported the organization's ability to convene stakeholders, elevate Black-led policy priorities, and influence state-level legislative and administrative processes, while continuing to build the infrastructure of the organization. BlackECE Executive Director, Keisha Nzewi, shared *"Just the fact that it's money that we have to help keep our organization fiscally healthy... allows us to be more risk-tolerant and just be us."*

Key accomplishments include:

- Convening the first cohort of the Institute for Culturally Affirming Practices for Black Children, with 23 participants from across California, and launching a second cohort in 2026.
- Developing an ancestral coaching model for early educators and caregivers of young Black children, rooted in Black culture and community wisdom rather than deficit-based coaching.
- Hosting the second annual symposium on linguistic justice for Black children, featuring distinguished speakers and drawing strong emotional and intellectual engagement from participants.
- Expanding language justice work by partnering with organizations such as Catalyst California, Early Edge, and Californians Together to advance understanding of Black English in early education.
- Expanding partnerships with statewide organizations, including First 5 California, to bring early childhood issues into broader statewide education conversations.
- Producing a series of "Black Papers" on Black language and early learning, with public release beginning in February 2026 and continuing through August.
- Supporting child care provider advocates to travel regularly to Sacramento for hearings, meetings, and advocacy related to racial wage justice and workplace standards.
- Growing from a small founding team to five full-time staff plus consultants, strengthening the organization's ability to sustain programming, policy work, and statewide partnerships.
- Bringing on a full-time policy staff person in Sacramento, creating a stronger, more consistent presence in state policy spaces.
- Building organizational capacity through an organizational assessment, updated job descriptions for all staff, and relaunching the board with clearer roles and stronger structure.



SELF-DETERMINATION



AFFIRMING IDENTITIES

“WE SURVIVED... AND RJEF BRINGING US ALL TOGETHER. I THINK THAT IS IMPORTANT. TO KNOW THAT WE’RE NOT ALONE. WE’RE HERE, AND WE’RE HERE STRONGLY.”

KEISHA NZEWI





Esperanza de Tejas Board of Directors receiving their keys and holding their first meeting at their resource center

ESPERANZA DE TEJAS, INC. / TEXAS

A STORY OF GROWTH AND READINESS

Esperanza de Tejas' first year with RJEF reflects a period of intentional growth paired with stronger organizational foundations. As demand for services increased, the organization expanded its reach while investing in staffing, systems, and financial infrastructure to sustain that growth. These investments allowed Esperanza de Tejas to respond quickly to community needs, expand into new regions, and maintain trusted relationships with immigrant families navigating complex systems. Together, these changes positioned the organization not only to meet immediate needs, but to operate with greater stability, readiness, and long-term impact across Texas. Esperanza de Tejas is building the conditions for long-term community well-being by increasing access to essential resources, strengthening local supports, and creating more equitable systems so that families have greater access to fresh food, educational and workforce opportunities, and healthier, more stable lives.

Organization Overview

Esperanza de Tejas, Inc. is a community-based organization based in Texas that provides culturally responsive, language-accessible support to all families including immigrant and mixed-status families navigating complex systems. Founded to meet urgent gaps in access to healthcare, public benefits, and social services, Esperanza de Tejas operates at the intersection of direct service, navigation support, and community trust. In a policy environment that is often hostile to immigrants, Esperanza de Tejas serves as a critical access point for families seeking support and stability.

In response to the floods in Central Texas in 2025, Brianna Davis, Executive Director, shared how RJEJ funding enabled rapid, on-the-ground support, *“Because of the funding, we were able to go to communities affected by the floods and provide diapers and hygiene items... it really has allowed us to just continue the work and increase it in ensuring that we’re able to provide all these items to families.”*

RJEJ Impact at a Glance

During the first year of RJEJ funding, Esperanza de Tejas focused on strengthening internal capacity while rapidly scaling services to meet growing community demand. RJEJ’s funding allowed Esperanza de Tejas to invest in organizational infrastructure and staffing while expanding its reach across Texas, ensuring more families could access timely, trusted support.

Key accomplishments include:

- Ended the year having served nearly 30,000 people, increasing service provision by 40% or 12,000 people.
- Expanding programs into four additional Texas counties based on urgent needs of the community.
- Responding immediately during the government shutdown and SNAP disruptions, including providing formula and other essentials to families when benefits were cut or delayed.
- Serving as an official Red Cross partner during Texas floods, distributing diapers and hygiene items in affected communities.
- Increasing policy influence and visibility by funding travel to the state capital, where the Executive Director met with legislators, challenged funding decisions, and advocated against a bill that would have harmed unhoused mothers and their children.
- Hiring a former client as a community outreach specialist and supporting her to become a certified community health worker.
- Investing in staff well-being through monthly rest stipends, massages, and a board-staff retreat centered on connection, gratitude, and sustainability.
- Expanding to a team of six staff, including hiring a new strategic support lead and growing to five part-time staff.
- Invested in leadership by increasing Executive Director compensation and shifting the role from direct service to strategic leadership, strengthening long-term organizational capacity.
- Developing stronger internal systems, including a succession plan, logic models for each program, and audit readiness through hiring a CPA.



“RJEF HAS GIVEN US A TON OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT WE WOULDN’T HAVE HAD BEFORE. WE WERE JUST NICKEL AND DIMING, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET BY. NOW IT HAS ALLOWED US TO BE IN A POSITION TO BE MORE STRATEGIC IN OUR INVESTMENTS.”

BRIANNA DAVIS

Below: Esperanza de Tejas diaper distribution with the County Commissioner in the Rio Grande Valley.



BRIGHT BLACK.



Group photo of EBB annual Mama's Night Out to support relationship building and respite for mamas

EQUITY BEFORE BIRTH / DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

A STORY OF STANDING TEN TOES DOWN

Equity Before Birth's (EBB) first year with RJEF is a story of resilience, care, and collective responsibility. In a year marked by compounding crises, RJEF's funding allowed EBB to "stand ten toes down" in its mission and respond to urgent needs without compromising values or core services. By trusting families and addressing the interconnected conditions shaping birth outcomes, EBB demonstrates that when parents are supported and empowered, infants are given the conditions they need not only to survive, but to thrive. EBB's accomplishments reflect broader progress toward birth and family equity by increasing access to critical supports, reducing barriers during pregnancy and early parenthood, and helping create conditions where Black and Brown mothers, birthing people, and their infants can experience greater safety, dignity, and well-being.

Organization Overview

EBB is a Black-led birth justice organization based in Durham, North Carolina, led by Executive Director, Joy Spencer. Founded during the COVID-19 pandemic, Equity Before Birth emerged in response to persistent racial inequities in maternal and infant health outcomes. Grounded in lived experience and community trust, EBB works to save the lives of Black and Brown mamas, birthing people, and their infants by increasing access to culturally responsive care, advancing economic justice, and advocating for systems change. Through direct service, mutual aid, and policy advocacy, EBB addresses the structural conditions shaping birth outcomes and family well-being.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

During the first year of RJEF funding, Equity Before Birth operated amid overlapping crises, including economic instability, delayed public benefits, housing insecurity, and ongoing policy attacks on reproductive rights. RJEF's funding allowed EBB to remain responsive to escalating community needs while maintaining continuity of care for families during pregnancy and postpartum.

Key accomplishments include:

- Strengthening core program supporting families before and after birth including doula and midwifery care, therapy, transportation to medical appointments, baby supplies, and peer support.
- Mobilizing weekly emergency food and baby supply distributions within five days of SNAP delays, creating a rapid-response system for families in crisis. The weekly distribution continued even after SNAP was reinstated "because people needed that support like yesterday."
- Serving a growing number of Spanish-speaking and immigrant families who turned to the organization as a trusted source of food, clothing, transportation, and support during periods of fear and isolation.
- Hosting large-scale diaper distributions, with more than 200 families served in two hours during one event.
- Launching Bridge to Stability, a housing support effort that helped families avoid eviction or move from cars and unsafe conditions into temporary housing.
- Deepening family supports through financial literacy, budgeting assistance, wellness workshops, CPR training, and health education.
- Expanding partnerships and advocacy efforts, including advocacy days, Black Maternal Health Week activities, legislative engagement, and being invited to teams drafting legislation for families and children.
- Building internal capacity by adding a part-time communications role, upgrading staff laptops, strengthening volunteer coordination, and bringing on new partners for therapy services and childcare support.



**“OUR EXPANSION
LOOKS LIKE GOING
DEEPER INSTEAD
OF GOING WIDER.”**

JOY SPENCER



EBB hosted a blood pressure and CPR class teaching families how to measure and monitor their blood pressure and distributed blood pressure devices



MESE advocates and community members advocating for education justice for ESOL kids

MIGRANT EQUITY SOUTHEAST / SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY

Migrant Equity Southeast's (MESE) first year with RJEF shows the resilience of immigrant families in Coastal Georgia and their view of MESE as a trusted community partner leading with collective care and respect. Amid targeted attacks on immigrants, families who otherwise would be too afraid to seek help know they can turn to MESE and be received with dignity. RJEF funding strengthened MESE's mutual aid work and community programming including diaper and food distribution, school supplies, tutoring, after-school support, and summer learning opportunities for families who had nowhere else to turn. MESE also advanced advocacy efforts focused on language justice in healthcare and education, housing and basic needs, and ensuring immigrant families' voices are included in decision-making spaces where they are historically invisibilized.

Organization Overview

MESE is a Latinx- and immigrant-led 501(c)(3) organization based in Savannah, Georgia, co-founded and led by Executive Director Daniela Rodriguez and her team. Established during the COVID-19 pandemic, MESE was created to address the lack of culturally competent, language-accessible support for migrant and refugee families in South Georgia. In a region where immigrant-serving organizations are scarce, MESE's mission is to work for the liberation, economic justice, and human rights of migrant and refugee communities through empowerment, advocacy, education, and direct support.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

During the first year of RJEF funding, MESE operated in a near-constant state of rapid response amid an increasingly hostile immigration climate where they were front line responders to one of the largest single-site immigration raids in history at the Hyundai Metaplant in Ellabell, GA. Funding allowed MESE to strengthen organizational sustainability and build community power while responding to urgent needs from a community reeling from targeted ICE raids and the termination of Temporary Protective Status (TPS), ripping families apart and pushing them into economic precarity as breadwinners are detained.

Daniela Rodriguez, Executive Director, shares, *“It has helped us to be able to keep up faster with the demand that we have of community needs... With the current immigration climate, every day, every week, that phone doesn’t stop ringing, and also texts. And so, thanks to the funding, we have been able to have a person that is able to cover the office phone full-time.”*

Key accomplishments include:

- Maintaining a full-time, language-accessible hotline so immigrant families could access immediate support related to immigration enforcement, school concerns, healthcare access, housing instability, and other urgent needs.
- Responding after the Hyundai Metaplant raid by helping families navigate fear, school safety concerns, and the immediate disruptions caused by immigration enforcement.
- Strengthening the diaper assistance program so families seeking baby supplies could also connect to broader resources and supports related to children’s health, education and other issues impacting their children’s well-being.
- Increasing in-person outreach across 30 counties in South Georgia, including rural communities located several hours from Savannah.
- Expanding programming for children through summer classes, after-school programs, and a volunteer-led tutoring program supporting students struggling academically and “to give them a little bit of joy during these difficult times”
- Building stronger referral networks with churches, schools, business owners, local leaders, and nonprofit partners that now help connect immigrant families to MESE’s services.
- Securing an immigration attorney on retainer to provide free consultations and help families navigate TPS, asylum, and other immigration protections.
- Hosting Power of Attorney clinics across multiple counties so parents could establish legal plans to protect their children in case of detention or deportation.
- Leading Know Your Rights and family preparedness trainings that helped parents update school records, identify trusted caregivers, and prepare safety plans for their children.
- Supporting staff sustainability through monthly group therapy, professional development opportunities, and team-building activities that recognize the emotional toll of frontline immigrant justice work.



ENVIRONMENT



ECONOMIC INCLUSION



SELF-DETERMINATION



AFFIRMING IDENTITIES

“SOME OF THE TESTIMONIES WE HEARD FROM THE COMMUNITY WERE AMAZING. THEIR LEVEL OF TRUST AND HOW PEOPLE FELT SEEN BY US. IT WAS A REMINDER THAT THE EARLY MORNINGS, THE LATE NIGHTS, THE NONSTOP HUSTLE, IT’S WORTH IT BECAUSE IT’S MAKING THE LIVES OF SOME PEOPLE BETTER.”

DANIELA RODRIGUEZ

Below: Community leaders from counties across South Georgia advocating for immigrant rights at the Georgia State Capitol for the first time



A STORY OF GROWTH AND MOMENTUM

Navajo Birthworker Collective's first year with RJEF is a story of growth and momentum. For years the organization worked with limited resources, planning programs around small budgets and volunteer capacity within a community that survived forced sterilizations, cultural erasure, and discrimination and dismissive treatment from healthcare providers. After years of surviving in difficult soil, RJEF funding allowed the team to begin flourishing—expanding its reach, strengthening its infrastructure, and investing in tools that support its collective members. With stronger partnerships, expanded programs, and deeper policy engagement, Navajo Birth Collective is growing in directions that will allow Navajo families and birth workers to shape healthier futures for the next generation.

Organization Overview

Navajo Birthworker Collective works to improve the health of Navajo families and ensure cultural preservation by providing compassionate, unbiased, and accessible care strengthening birthing families and infant health through holistic and traditional practices that have faced extermination by past policies seeking to erase Navajo culture. Serving communities across the Navajo Nation including parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado, the organization supports families during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum to combat the high rates of pregnancy-related mortality while promoting healing, cultural knowledge, and language preservation.

Navajo Birthworker Collective's work centers Navajo traditions and community-based and culturally-grounded care by connecting families with doulas, lactation support providers, partnerships with traditional practitioners, and local support networks. The organization also helps them navigate the individual-level implicit bias inherent in health systems and public resources and the system-level barriers to access due to the slashed budgets of Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, Head Start, and housing assistance. Their approach integrates education, direct services, and advocacy to address the broader conditions that shape maternal and infant health.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

During the first year of RJEF funding, Navajo Birthworker Collective expanded its ability to support families while strengthening internal capacity and partnerships. Flexible funding was *"just the support we really needed,"* allowing the organization to grow its team, invest in tools for its collective members, and respond quickly to community needs during crises.

Amanda Singer, Executive Director, also spoke about the impact of the funds on their visibility: *"We're able to do more, meaning that we can actually travel to other communities without having to put our own money into it, and be able to table and go out there and present our history, our present, and our future... and being able to help other tribal communities wanting do something similar to what we're doing."*



Community healing circle hosted by Navajo Birthworker Collective

Key accomplishments include:

- Responding to community needs during regional wildfires by organizing donation drives, delivering hygiene supplies, and distributing traditional herbal respiratory supports. Including collaborating with herbalists to develop educational materials on herbal simmer pots families can use to improve indoor air quality during smoke season.
- Expanding partnerships with hospitals, home visiting programs, Head Start, and food assistance providers to strengthen wraparound support for families.
- Joining the New Mexico BIPOC Early Childhood Coalition and participating in the UNM Early Childhood ECHO network to expand learning and collaboration.
- Launching focus groups to guide the development of a gender justice initiative and identify emerging needs within Navajo communities.
- Advocating with state agencies and partners to address barriers to doula reimbursement through Medicaid and Indian Health Service.
- Contributing to policy conversations that led to changes in proposed state regulations affecting doulas and birth workers.
- Bringing on two additional contractors to expand organizational capacity and support program delivery.
- Partnering with a Native-led consultant to design a new website and strengthen the organization's digital infrastructure.
- Providing laptops and tablets for approximately 15 collective members to improve coordination, outreach, and service delivery.



“WE ALWAYS HAD TO PLAN AROUND THAT SMALLER BUDGET... BUT ONCE YOU ALL SEEDED US WITH THAT FUNDING, WE CAN ACTUALLY SEE OUR ROOTS AND THE WHOLE PLANT GROWING.”

AMANDA SINGER





SOWEGA Rising celebrates the graduation of 25 doulas in Southwest Georgia.

SOWEGA RISING / SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

A STORY OF SECURITY, GROWTH, AND RURAL POWER

SOWEGA Rising’s first year with RJEF is a story of stability at a critical moment. In a year when many small rural organizations struggled to survive, RJEF’s multi-year, trust-based support provided the security SOWEGA Rising needed not only to sustain its work, but to grow it. The funding allowed the organization to expand staff capacity, respond to urgent community needs, strengthen family supports, and deepen its policy and advocacy work across Southwest Georgia. At the same time, it affirmed that SOWEGA Rising did not need to reshape its mission to fit the fund. Instead, its existing work to improve education, health, economic security, and community power was already essential to child and family well-being. With stronger capacity, deeper partnerships, and growing statewide momentum, SOWEGA Rising is entering its next chapter by becoming statewide in 2026.



Community health workers and doulas pushing for Medicaid expansion in Georgia

Organization Overview

SOWEGA Rising is a Southwest Georgia-based organization that mobilizes people and resources to improve the well-being, quality of life, and political power of marginalized communities across the region. Grounded in

community organizing and advocacy, the organization works across multiple issue areas including education equity, food access, rural health, historic preservation, criminal justice reform, housing, climate justice, and economic mobility. SOWEGA Rising's work is rooted in the realities of rural Southwest Georgia, where long-term economic decline, disinvestment, poverty, and environmental crises have shaped the conditions families face. By building local leadership and advancing systems change, the organization helps communities advocate for the resources and policies they need to thrive.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

During the first year of RJEF funding, SOWEGA Rising used flexible support to stabilize and expand its work during a difficult funding climate.

Key accomplishments include:

- Launching “Dental Tips with Flossy,” a rural oral health initiative after observing that many young children in the region lacked access to dental care and were experiencing severe oral health problems including rotting teeth. The program reached hundreds of pre-K children across Southwest Georgia through Head Starts, daycare centers, and community events. They distributed dental kits including toothbrushes, toothpaste, and floss while building partnerships with local dentists and early childhood programs.
- Strengthening maternal and infant support systems by training and graduating nearly 25 community doulas in partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine.
- Coordinating baby supply distribution through doulas for families impacted by rising costs, SNAP reductions, and economic instability.
- Graduated 25 teacher advocates through a fellowship that trained educators in organizing, advocacy, and policy change.
- Increasing rapid-response capacity by partnering with Migrant Equity Southeast to distribute Know Your Rights materials and organize trainings in rural communities impacted by immigration enforcement.
- Building stronger parent power through listening sessions and advocacy trainings in multiple counties, helping parents identify needs and speak directly to school systems and school boards.
- Expanding organizational capacity by hiring a new education organizer, allowing the organization to deepen its work in parent advocacy, teacher organizing, and education justice.



“THERE WERE OTHERS THAT DIDN'T SURVIVE THIS YEAR, ESPECIALLY SMALLER RURAL ORGANIZATIONS... TO HAVE STABLE FUNDERS THAT BELIEVED IN US AND WERE WILLING TO STICK WITH US MEANT EVERYTHING.”

SHERRELL BYRD



Families receiving services at Mothers of Gynecology Wellness POD

THE MORE UP CAMPUS / MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

A STORY OF RECLAIMING HISTORY AND BUILDING CARE

More Up Campus's first year with RJEF translated a vision into reality. With stable funding, the organization has been able to move beyond piecing together small grants and instead build a physical and programmatic foundation for its work. By reclaiming the history of Black women, expanding access to maternal health care, and creating spaces for healing and learning, More Up Campus is challenging the medical system to reflect on the cruelty embedded in the field of gynecology, improving Black pregnancy-related and child mortality, and shaping new possibilities for families in Montgomery and across the region.

Organization Overview

More Up Campus is a Black-led organization in Montgomery, Alabama, working at the intersection of reproductive justice, historical truth-telling, and maternal health. Founded by Michelle Browder, the organization emerged from her discovery of the history of enslaved Black women whose bodies were exploited in the development of gynecology. In response, she began creating spaces to honor their stories, including learning to weld and creating sculpture to represent these women.

This work has grown into the development of the More Up Campus, a multi-use space that includes a Gyne-

cology Health and Wellness Museum and a clinical care site. The museum and interpretive center foreground the lived experiences of enslaved women while educating visitors on the history of reproductive health, sterilization, and eugenics. At the same time, the campus is being developed as a place where families can access culturally grounded maternal health care, including support from doulas, midwives, and medical practitioners.

Through education, community engagement, and advocacy, More Up Campus is working to reclaim history, shift narratives, and improve maternal and child health outcomes in Alabama and beyond.

RJEF Impact at a Glance

RJEF funding came at the right moment as More Up Campus is transitioning into a nationally recognized organization with physical space, programming, and partnerships. Flexible support allowed the organization to invest in infrastructure while expanding services and community reach. Michelle Browder shared, “*we’ve been able to establish our infrastructure, provide more space to give care to the community, and then continue on with our mission with ease.*”

Key accomplishments include:

- Serving hundreds of families, including supporting over 270 children and caregivers and providing comprehensive care such as housing, doula services, and safe birthing access.
- Reaching hundreds through education and training, including engaging medical students and community members in learning about the history and evolution of medicine.
- Acquiring and developing a permanent campus to house a museum, clinical services, and community programming, including space for families traveling from rural areas.
- Bringing the museum to near completion, sharing the story about the mothers of gynecology, the history of enslavement of women, and reproductive and maternal health.
- Expanding maternal health services through both a physical site and mobile clinic, providing lactation support, doula care, consultations, and wellness services for women and families.
- Building strategic partnerships with medical professionals, hospital systems, and consultants to support clinical services, curriculum development, and policy efforts.
- Leveraging RJEF funding to secure additional local and national funding while advancing policy advocacy, including efforts to open a birthing center in Montgomery.
- Securing 501(c)(3) status and strengthening organizational infrastructure, including financial management, compliance, and reporting systems.



“RJEF TOOK THE STRESS OFF THE VISIONARY.. WHEN YOU HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE AND PEOPLE THAT YOU TRUST, IT MAKES THE WORK SO MUCH EASIER.”

MICHELLE BROWDER

Below: Executive Director, Michelle Browder, speaking at Anarcha Lucy Betsey Day of Reckoning Part 5 Conference

