

# ANNUAL REPORT

2025



THE  
SOUTHWEST  
COLLECTIVE



[SWCOLLECTIVE.ORG](http://SWCOLLECTIVE.ORG)

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# A LETTER FROM US

When we issued this report last year, it felt like the world was about to fall apart, and in some ways...it has.

We are not naive to what is happening just outside our doors, to our neighbors, friends and family. Like you, we have seen some absolutely horrific, inhumane things unfold on our streets lately.

There have also been moments that have given us hope, and we cling to those when things become overwhelming and sad: people gathering food to share, neighbors becoming friends while assembling whistle kits, and communities banding together to buy out street vendors.

We hope you're embedded in community and finding small moments of joy, too. And remember: doing something that feels small is better than doing nothing at all.

Please make sure you're centered in your community and find a small thing you can do to help your neighbor. Now is not the time to be apathetic.

We would love to see you and your family soon. And until then, we hope you stay well - and that the new year will have good things in store for all of us.



*Maria, Adriana, Mayra & Jaime*  
The Southwest Collective Board of Directors

## WE DON'T LOOK FOR VOLUNTEERS. WE LOOK FOR LEADERS WITH HEART.

The Southwest Collective was created in an Archer Heights basement in 2019. Born out of a need to connect with neighbors outside of the traditional means, such as a neighborhood watch or civic association, SWC quickly gained momentum by "meeting people where they're at" - and tailoring programs and outreach around the busy lifestyles of young families.

SWC is not a large, established organization. We're a group of your neighbors, from Gage Park to Garfield Ridge, who see the need for connection and community among our siloed neighborhoods.

For us, this work is deeply personal, and allows us to set what we feel is the right example for our own kids: to lead from where we live, with love.

Since our inception in 2019, we have worked hard to cultivate relationships in our school communities, at our libraries and parks, with our local elected officials and small business owners - all to help strengthen community connection and get to know each other on a deeper level.

Our requests for volunteers are minimal, usually because we prefer to have a dedicated group of people that we know well, that we can count on, just as much as they can count on us. After all, that's what community looks like!

If you would like to tap into an organization on a deeper, less transactional level, we would love to have you. A great place to start is at our quarterly community meetings or our monthly Freebies for Families event, where there's time in between tasks to talk and learn about each other! The best part is, family and friend groups are welcome too. Bring yours and let's see what we can accomplish together.



MANY LOCAL YOUTH, INCLUDING OUR OWN KIDS, HAVE EACH LOGGED OVER 100 HOURS WORKING WITH US TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN OUR COMMUNITY. THEY WERE HONORED IN A PINNING CEREMONY THIS YEAR, WITH AWARDS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE.

# GETTING TO KNOW SWC



## Come Hang With Us!

Meeting likeminded people is a big part of why we started SWC. ***Join us out in the community - it's a great way to socialize and make friends right here in your own backyard.*** The conversations are interesting and funny, and the work is pretty rewarding too.

## UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

### MLK JR Day of Service

- Every year, we provide books to distribute at our network of library boxes. Join us and claim a box or two in observance of the day.

### Freebies for Families monthly event

- Every month, we put out a call for help with set up, donation intake and break down of this event. Bring your friends or family along.

### Bi-annual community meeting

- This open meeting occurs every spring and fall at a local coffee shop. It's an opportunity to meet likeminded neighbors and hear about upcoming events and plans.

### Dia de Muertos Trunk or Treat

- Every October, we transform a parking lot into a community celebration of culture, art and life. It takes many people to decorate, set up and create a joy-filled day for local families.



# WHAT WE DO





## ABOUT THE PROGRAM & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Since 2019, Freebies for Families has provided a safe space for parents, in memory of Marlen Ochoa-Lopez. Every month, parents can pick up free necessities, like a sleeve of diapers or a few gently used onesies, connect to wraparound services and meet other parents. Each month, we set up at a federally qualified healthcare center (FQHC) or local school, so parents can get what they need and "build their village."

## THE CURRENT SITUATION: FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES

This program improves health outcomes from birth to 5 years of age, connecting parents to resources, necessities and each other.

In this moment, where federal benefits and safety nets like SNAP and Medicaid are being slashed, this program is a lifeline, particularly for young families on the southwest side. The community has banded together to share with each other, so we're happy to keep this going.

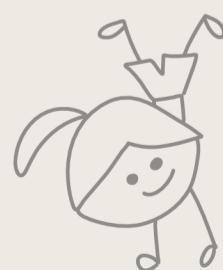
## OUR IMPACT

**6 1400 3600**

years of  
monthly  
events

families served

pounds of baby  
clothing donated  
and reused



## ABOUT THE PROGRAM & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

In the shadow of Midway Airport, it's hard to compete as a small business. National chains, big box stores and franchises come with big budgets and the expertise to scale. We're here to level the playing field - with everything from bilingual one-on-one meetings to podcasts and social media tutorials.

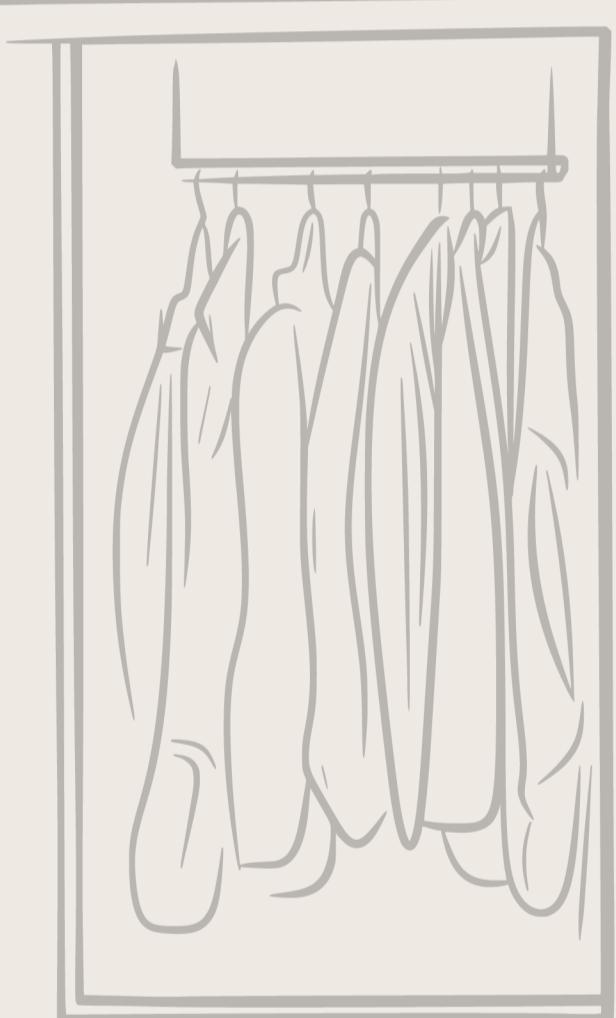
## THE CURRENT SITUATION: TOUGH TIMES AHEAD

We began the year with a press conference, where we stood with business owners and business organizations against the incoming administration's efforts to tear apart our communities with ramped-up immigration enforcement.

Toward the end of summer, as tensions turned to violence with federal agents, we visited businesses to provide signage, training and advice on keeping staff and customers safe.

We also dropped a Boycott Guide for the Southwest Side to encourage local patronage over big boxes, whose corporate offices were too slow to implement safety plans for staff and customers.

With more families choosing to stay in, our small businesses are struggling to stay afloat, and we have been making every effort to help them pivot to keep revenue coming in.



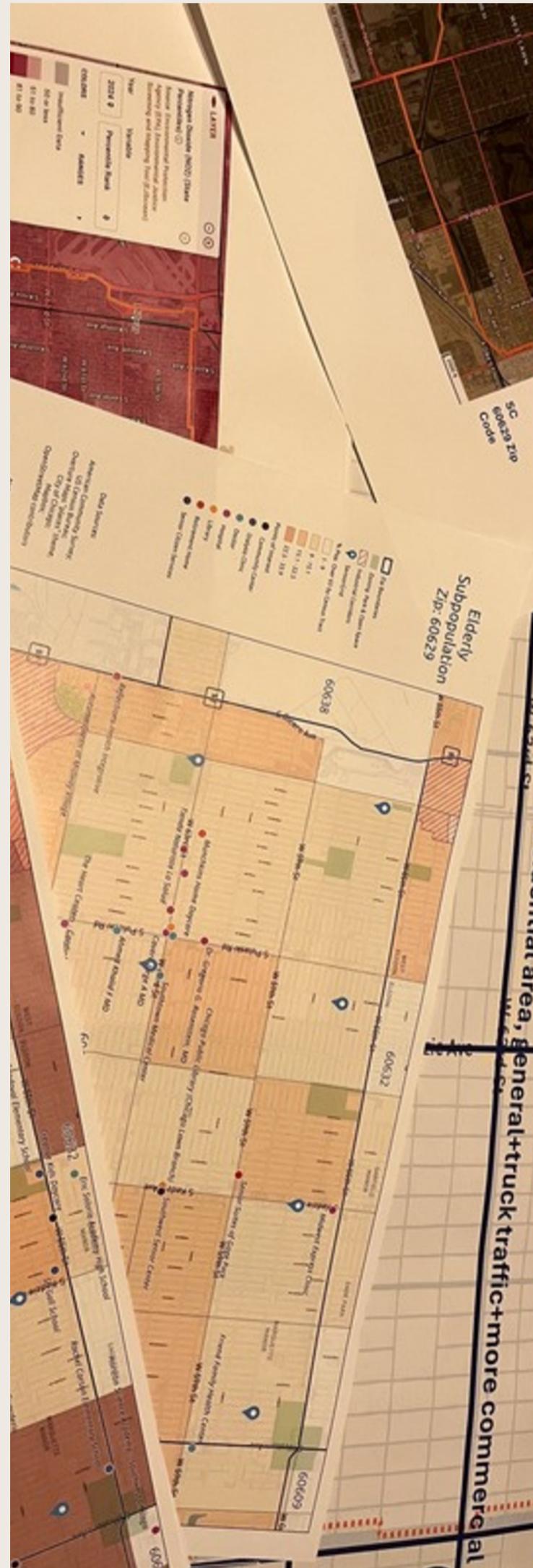
### OUR IMPACT

**243** **15**

businesses assisted  
since 2020

businesses assisted  
more than 3 times





## ABOUT THE PROGRAM & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

With the threat of climate change looming, it will take all of us to offset the damage that's already done. So, after spending two summers planting almost 200 trees across the southwest side, we diversified our environmental focus in 2025 - encouraging solar panel installation among homeowners, advising on air sensor placement and advocating for alternative transit.

200+

100,000  
trees planted  
in parkways

30+

air sensors  
placed in our  
communities

# THE CURRENT SITUATION: DEFENDING AGAINST INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION

Demand for instant delivery of everything from toilet paper to electronics means that the southwest side is seeing more truck traffic and warehousing than ever. So it's critical to educate our community and install infrastructure helps all of us on the southwest side hold polluters accountable.

This year, we helped Illinois Solar for All connect residents with affordable solar panel installation, and advised Chicago & Illinois Departments of Public Health on air sensor placement in our neighborhoods. We also continued our alternative transit advocacy, detailed on the next page.

**ABOUT THE PROGRAM &  
WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US**

In a normal year, our communities face deep-rooted systemic inequity when it comes to food access. And we rise, week after week, to meet the need. But in 2025, with SNAP benefits being canceled, even for a short period of time, 1 in 4 children in Cook County faced the effects of food insecurity. We continued our work to increase access to fresh, nutritious food, by building the infrastructure needed to get there.

**20%**

average percentage of southwest side households below the poverty line, not receiving SNAP benefits\*

**104**

food rescue & redistribution missions executed by Southwest Collective since Jan 2025

\* Source: Chicago Health Atlas

**THE CURRENT SITUATION: IMPROVING  
INFRASTRUCTURE, INTERVENING AT CRITICAL  
POINTS**

We have collaborated with several FQHCs, nonprofit organizations and environmental coalitions to provide more 24/7 access points such as fridges and dry food boxes. With many families sheltering-in-place in the current climate, we are working closely with many other organizations to deliver food and other necessities, and provide wellbeing checks to ensure people are getting the care they need.

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Car culture rules the southwest side—although not everyone drives—and this vehicle-centric culture has become dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists, and even drivers. We have spent the past 6 years mapping and leading family-friendly bike rides across our neighborhoods to encourage more biking and walking, especially for short trips. We continue to advocate for safer streets for all—so everybody has a chance to enjoy our communities, no matter how they get around.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION: MAKING THE “BIG STREETS” SAFER

Over the course of 2024-5, we implemented a campaign, “Pulaski, Slow TF Down,” to gather community engagement and input, and then to advocate for pedestrian-friendly infrastructure on Pulaski Road. Pedestrian-friendly infrastructure—such as bump-outs, pedestrian islands, and protected bike lanes—makes it easier for our neighbors, such as seniors and children, to get around without a car.

### 2 MILES

of safety infrastructure installed on Pulaski Road, as a result of our Pulaski, Slow TF Down campaign

### 38 BIKE ROUTES

established for safe, family-friendly biking, across the southwest side.

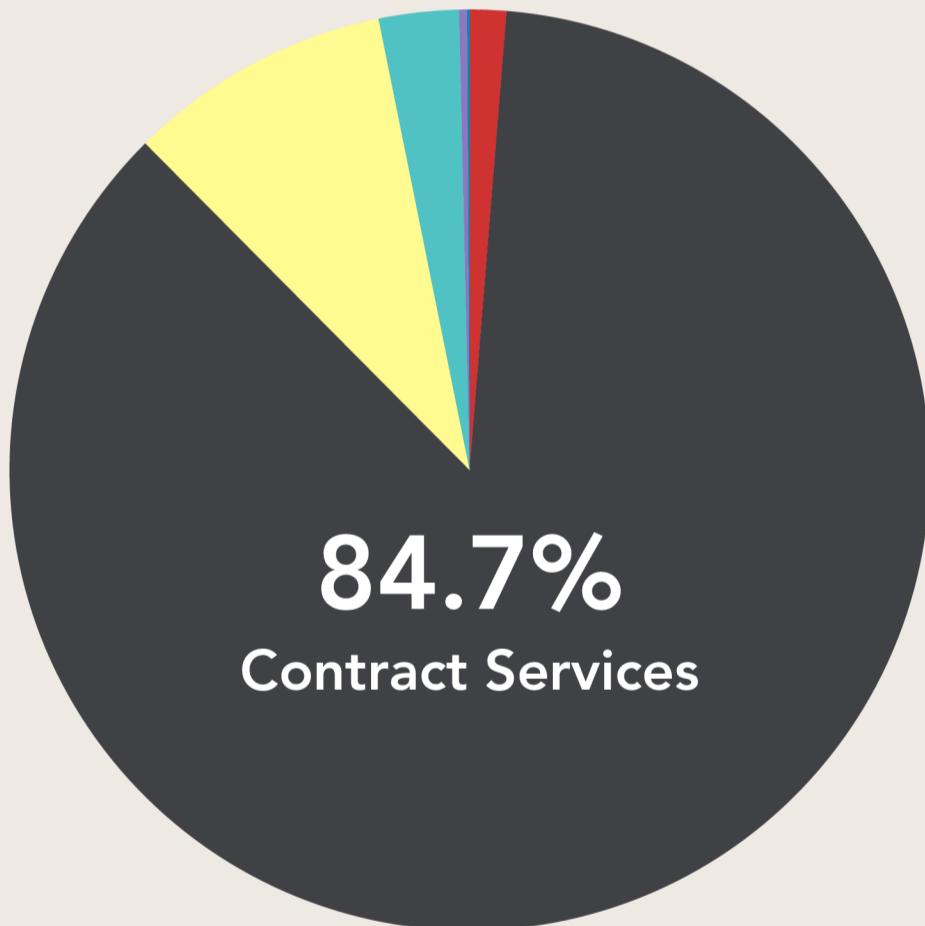
### 200+

attendees at our two big community bike rides, in Brighton Park (spring) and Garfield Ridge (fall)



# EXPENDITURES

\$192,607.00



## Administrative Costs: 6.6%

We typically reserve a standard 10% De Minimis rate when budgeting for grant awards.



## Office Expenses: 6.6%

The cost of doing business. We keep this low by working remotely and on a flexible, part time basis.



## Supplies & Misc: 2%

Stuff like printer ink, our Zoom subscription, etc.



## Business Expenses:

Fees we incur for things like insurance, financial audits, etc.



## Contract Services: 84.7%

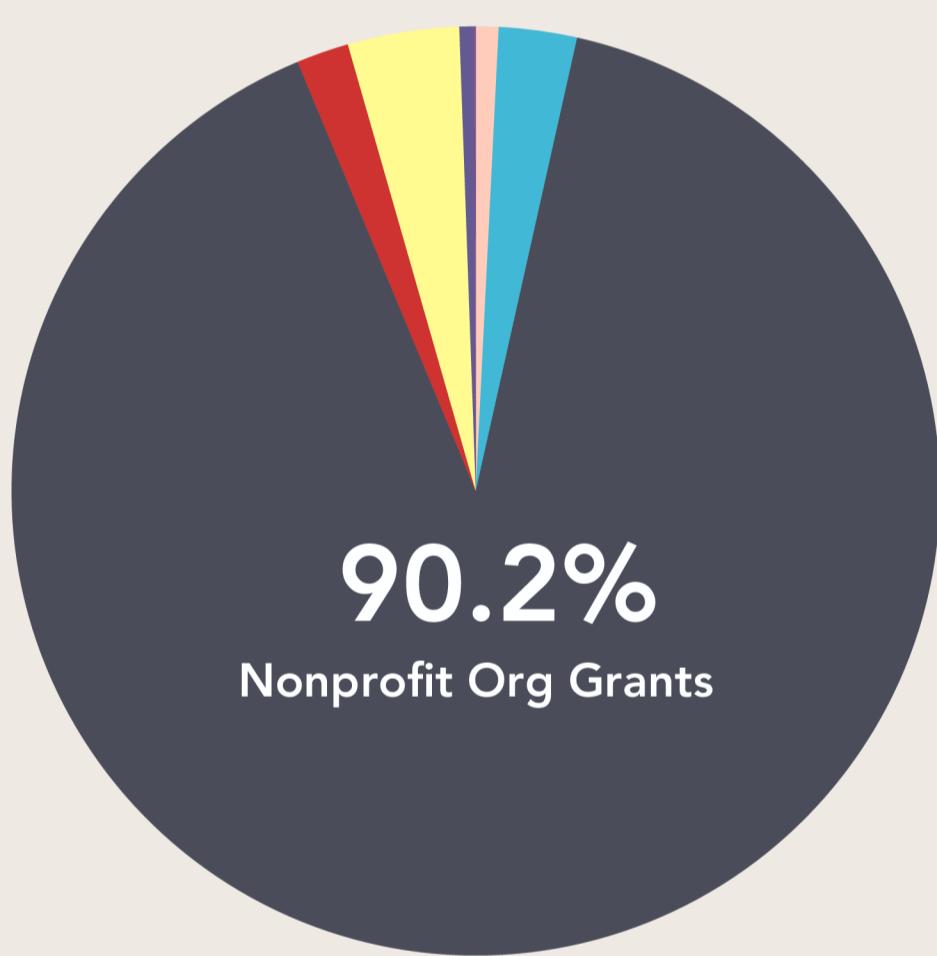
Seems high, right? Keep in mind: that number represents everyone at SWC: board members, staff, part-timers and regular volunteers who take on more than a volunteer's share - all of whom have 1099 status.

We all work on a 1099 basis, rather than full time, to keep overhead low and allow residents with lived experience to be compensated for their work and perspective. *Funds go right back out to community members - whether for services or supplemental pay that levels the playing field!*

# INCOME

**\$147,201.00**

**NOTE: SWC's fiscal year is from Jan - Dec; however, much of our funding is on a June-June fiscal calendar. This has an effect on our final income numbers.**



**Nonprofit Org Grants: 90.2%**

We serve as an outreach machine for more established organizations in our communities to depend upon - ensuring that services reach community members in a timely manner.



**Direct Public Support: 1.8%**



**Donation Payments: 3.9%**



**Corporate Contributions: .5%**



**Corporate/Business Grants: .8%**



**Foundation & Trust Grants: 2.7%**

THANK  
YOU