



# PROGRAM IMPACT NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 2022

## “BakerRipley Challenge: Houston Redistricting” wins Rice Datathon



The “BakerRipley Challenge: Houston Redistricting”, a data project completed by Rice students, won 1st place in the annual Rice Datathon. 47 teams participated, in the event that was held in January.

Four Rice University undergraduate students won the top prize for their analysis of Houston voting districts at the 24-hour data science competition. The team – Ankit Patel (statistics major, minor in classical civilizations), Quan Le (computer science, computational and applied mathematics, mathematics major), Nathan Powell (computer science major) and Zach Rewolinski (computer science major) – used optimization and Markov chain Monte Carlo techniques to “redistrict” Houston’s City Council Districts. The challenge was to find an equitable distribution of representational boundaries for the City of Houston. The team also won the Best Social Impact Award.

Participating organizations included - Chevron, Shell, Google, and Goldman Sachs. The partnership with Rice further elevates BakerRipley’s standing with innovative institutions in the region and provides visibility to our work.

Link to the Rice University story [HERE](#).

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# COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

## Pasadena Campus Expansion Update

The Pasadena Campus building expansion is on schedule! In January, the Pasadena Team began delivering expanded programming and added a full schedule of enrichment courses for members including yoga, kids arts and music classes, Zumba, line dancing, and skill-building courses. One of our newest offerings is our beginners Circuit Maker Class where students learn how to use the Design Space Computer Software to create designs for the crafting machine. Participants are taught how to cut and press vinyl, card stock, leather, and other materials on items like T-shirts, mugs, and potholders. The class is in high demand, with over 20 students enrolled and a waitlist.

Student entrepreneurs who have a desire to take the next step in launching their own business, using our state-of-the-art equipment, are connected with the BakerRipley Small Business Program. For many, these skill building classes allows our neighbors to move up the socio-economic ladder.

## Immigration and Citizenship Offerings Expand at Pasadena Campus

On January 25th, Harris County awarded BakerRipley's Immigration Program one of the first contracts to provide immigration legal services for survivors of crime. The grant is to serve individuals and families who are on victim-based visas, DACA cases, naturalization cases, and direct representation cases. The Pasadena Immigration Team will lead these efforts under a new partnership with The Bridge Over Troubled Waters which is a shelter across the street from the Pasadena Campus. The Immigration Team will provide consultations at the shelter.

The Immigration and Citizenship Program is entering its second year at the Pasadena Campus. BakerRipley introduced its new Managing Attorney, Josephine Sorgwe. Josephine is from the University of Houston Immigration Clinic, where she served as a supervising attorney for six years. During the month of January, the Immigration and Citizenship Program held its first in-person Citizenship Forum.



# COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

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## Voter Registration Efforts in East Aldine Campus

During January, our BakerRipley Manager of Civic Engagement, Maritza Sepulveda, worked with our East Aldine Community Engineers, Aldine ISD, and the Harris County Elections Department to register Aldine ISD high-school seniors to vote ahead of the January 31st voter registration deadline.

As a result, 521 students at 7 high schools were registered to vote with the support of 10 Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars, which consisted of BakerRipley Community Engineers, volunteers, staff, social work interns, and Harris County Voter Registration Coordinators (from the Harris County Elections Department). BakerRipley will further engage these new voters in the electoral process in the coming weeks and months, helping to support a more civically active community.



# ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

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## Bridge to Tech Careers

When Latrent heard about the new BakerRipley Verizon Tech Equity Bridge Program, he knew this was the opportunity for him! As a married father of two young children looking to work remotely and enter a career in technology, Latrent knew this was the perfect opportunity for him and enrolled in the Fall 2021 Bridge cohort. He was an instant leader in the class and successfully completed the course, earning his CompTIA A+ certification in Core 1. Shortly after his studies, Latrent received a welcomed job offer and he is now working remotely in tech support with ADT.

Latrent believes that “we are here to help each other” and began streaming his study sessions to help his peers prepare for their practice labs and the credential exam. In addition, Latrent is registering as an official BakerRipley volunteer and has designed a week-long formal study group to give students the extra peer support they need to succeed. According to Latrent, “supporting others is my way of giving back.”



# ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

## English as a Second Language (ESL) for Professionals - Student Highlight

Natalia came to BakerRipley to learn English to advance her business and career. Having been in other ESL programs and finding they weren't the right fit for her, Natalia sought out BakerRipley's classes. Natalia is the founder of Nati's Gift Shop.

Alicia Punceles, her instructor, remembers how timid Natalia was at the start, fearing mispronouncing words, but she now rejoices at the incredible progress Natalia has made. "She and her classmates had to present an end-of-semester project to the class. The theme was: My hometown. Natalia was able to speak in front of her class about her hometown of Bogota. I was amazed at how much she improved speaking, reading, and writing English" said Punceles.

After three semesters in BakerRipley's ESL classes, Natalia is now poised to take her business to a broader audience and is confident in her English skills. Most recently, Shoutout HTX featured an interview with Natalia, where she spoke about her business, her art, and how she can inspire other up-and-coming business owners.



# EARLY HEAD START/HEAD START

## Words from our Fathers

The Early Childhood Education Fatherhood Program ended in 2021 with the "Dear Dad, Letters from the Heart" project. Seventy fathers (and father figures) from our Head Start Program participated in writing letters to themselves; to a person who had passed away; or to their higher Being. In their letters, they discussed emotional trauma lingering from missed opportunities in their past. Working with our Fatherhood Initiative Engagement Specialist, participants were led to recognize and release any repressed negative emotions, which often go unexpressed due to societal pressures and expectations for men.

A new cohort for the spring Fatherhood Parenting Classes will be kicking off in February 2022. We have provided our fathers (and father figures) with a complete schedule of virtual classes which they can join from home. The spring program will be utilizing the "Nurturing Fathers Curriculum," an evidence-based course designed to teach parenting and nurturing skills to men. Each class provides proven, practical skills for healthy family relationships and child development.

# HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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## Partnering with Texas A&M

BakerRipley has finalized our partnership agreement with Texas A&M for the “Digital Twin City for Age-Friendly Communities” Grant.

BakerRipley was sought as a thought partner and participant advocate/recruiter as TAMU engages in research of the Houston Magnolia area and how the physical environment affects older adults' ability to be physically active. This project will culminate in an urban planning model which will be presented to the City of Houston for improvements in the Magnolia neighborhood.

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## Action Planning for Personal Health and Wellness

Mr. Leonard Aulner is a regular in our senior education classes at the Jim & JoAnn Fonteno Senior Education Center. He attends so he can improve his quality of life but also commits to volunteering. At the Fonteno Senior Education Center, he learned about BakerRipley's Chronic Disease Self-Management classes.

“The classes are very instructional, interactive, fun, and they really encourage self-reliance” said Mr. Aulner. The program emphasizes “Action Planning” in every session. It is a tool that he uses every day. He learned to take a big goal and break it down to smaller, more achievable tasks to complete every day throughout the week.

During the six-week program, Mr. Aulner learned about the benefits of physical activity and he committed to living a more active lifestyle. First, he dusted off an old piece of workout equipment, a twist-disc that targets the waist and helps with balance. After a few weeks of 30 minutes a day - three times a week, he was able to move into higher intensities and durations. Later, he added the use of a treadmill into his exercise routine.

Mr. Aulner is looking forward to signing up for additional BakerRipley physical exercise programs like Tai Chi and Bingocize. He intends to stay active as he has seen increased energy levels that fuel his drive to continue helping others for many years to come!



# PROMISE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

## **PAL Program Visits Promise Community School**

Promise Community Schools' Ripley House campus welcomed Officer Charles Webb from The Greater Houston Police Activities League (GHPAL) South Central Division. The program focuses on youth crime prevention and utilizes educational, athletic, and recreational activities to build trust and understanding between police officers and youth. Officer Webb met with a group of our Ripley Campus fourth-grade students who expressed an interest in law enforcement careers. He took questions from students and shared his experience as a police officer.

The PAL program is based on the belief that if people are reached by law enforcement early in their youth, it will develop strong positive attitudes towards police officers.



# REGIONAL INITIATIVES

## **Investment in Utility Assistance**

The Utility Assistance program has received an anonymous \$200,000 donation. The funds are to assist our elderly, low-income, veteran, and disabled neighbors who may not be eligible for our State Utility Assistance Program.

**Private funds such as these are used to supplement public funds and we anticipate serving approximately 500 - 600 household.**

## **Expanded Mobile Tax Services**

**Thanks to funds received by Harris County, BakerRipley is bringing its free quality tax preparation services to more areas of the county this tax season.**

We have added six mobile sites for the East and Northwest areas of the County. BakerRipley is offering tax preparation and ITIN services two to three times during the tax season in these areas.

# WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

## Donating Cleaning and PPE Supplies to Care for Our Child Care Providers

Child care providers in Central Texas have struggled to obtain cleaning and protective supplies since the pandemic began in 2020.

To support our childcare providers, Workforce Solutions Capital Area and Austin Public Health hosted curbside pickup events for providers to receive cleaning and PPE supplies at no cost on January 7th and 8th. Over the two days, we distributed 24 pallets of supplies, including hand soap and sanitizer, gloves and paper towels, bath tissue, and bleach, to 128 providers. These childcare providers collectively care for 6,821 children in Travis County.

Austin Public Health also provided bleach and hand sanitizer and at-home testing kits for COVID19 for centers located in zip codes with the highest transmission rates.

One of the providers was Valerie Johnson, Director of Gethsemane Lutheran Children's Ministry. Her center has 16 staff and cares for 90 children.

"I was excited when I heard about this event. I have to say that PPE costs are really cutting into my budget because everything is so expensive, and having BakerRipley Workforce Solutions Capital Area do this for providers is awesome. It's really great you have the funding to do this for us. It helps out tremendously."





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