



together for our community!

2023 annual report



WeGo
Together
For Kids



MISSION

To support and enhance the health, safety, learning, and social-emotional well-being of children and families through a collaborative, coordinated, and comprehensive approach for the West Chicago community.

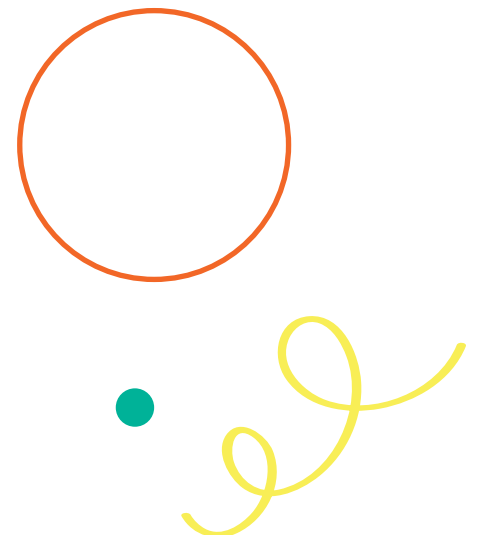
VISION

A vibrant and engaged community where children and families reach their full potential.



Table of Contents

A Letter from the Steering Committee Chairs	3
A Letter from the Director	5
Academic Achievement	6
Youth and Family Health	7
Early Childhood	10
Community Engagement	11
Stable Families	13
Emergency Preparedness	15
2023 Funders	16
Community Partners	17
Steering Committee Members	18





A LETTER FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Dear partners, neighbors, and friends,

Happy New Year! And cheers to another amazing year of partnership and collaboration with WeGo Together for Kids.

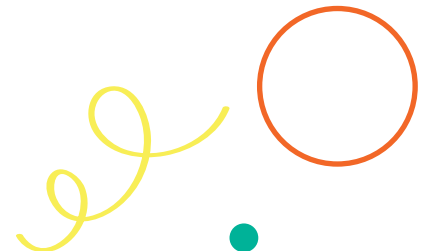
We believe one of the greatest beauties of WeGo Together for Kids is how this collaboration brings people from so many different backgrounds together, all for the good of our community! People from diverse backgrounds, all generations, different religious faiths, across all sectors of society – united in love for West Chicago residents and a common desire to see the strengthening and flourishing of this great community.

This year we added seven new community partners, for a total of 66 partners now engaged! It is exciting to welcome new voices and organizations to the work we do together. After you read this report and encounter just a taste of the many stories of impact from 2023, make sure to head to the website at wegotogetherforkids.com to see the updated partner list and to be inspired by more stories of partnership and community impact.

Let's keep going strong in 2024 and beyond. There is a great year ahead, and we are grateful for all who are a part of it!

In gratitude for all involved,

Kyle Reschke & Kara Murphy
Steering Committee Chair and Co-Chair





District 33 students participate in Small Bites, an after school program that focuses on making healthy snack choices. This program is funded by WeGo Together for Kids and led by Healthy West Chicago.

Dear WeGo Together for Kids,

This collaboration had an incredible 2023. As I look back on my first full year as Director, there are so many things to be thankful for and so, in the spirit of Spotify's Wrapped, here is our year in review.

We learned together.

12 partner meetings,
4 trainings and
more than 35 partner
visits with Molly.

We dreamt and planned together.

9 work groups,
5 planning teams,
18 grant applications.

We showed up for our community together.

1 playground built,
300+ jackets
distributed,
4 community events
attended,
1200 backpacks
distributed,
\$27,000+ granted
in rent and utility
assistance.

We grew together.

4 new grants secured,
5 programs launched,
1 staff person added,
27 local businesses
brought on as
sponsors and partners,
1 WGTK office opened
in West Chicago,
7 partners added!

We cried and served together.

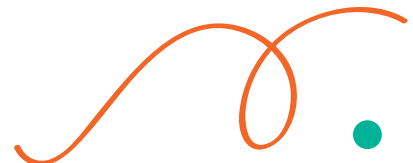
104 neighbors
displaced by fire, over
\$80,000 raised in aid,
76 partners, agencies
and businesses
providing food,
resources and
volunteers.

You, we touched the lives of thousands of kids and their families this year in West Chicago. The effect of this work was both immediate and will ripple through individual lives, homes, and the community for years to come.

2024 brings new opportunities and challenges as we strive to meet the needs of young people in West Chicago. As a network, we will rise to the occasion with dedication to collaboration and joy in our work. We can do more together than any of us could ever do alone.

Thank you for an incredible year, WeGo Together for Kids. It's an honor to walk alongside this work.

Molly Beck Dean
Director, WeGo Together for Kids





ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



Academic Achievement

focuses on West Chicago children and families having access to continuous learning opportunities. WeGo Together for Kids partners offer a variety of opportunities throughout the community.

2023 collaborations included a literacy event at Lemay Middle School. To foster a love of reading, students and parents were invited to a night of crafts, games, food and a workshop for parents around creating a space at home for students to do homework. Every student who attended received a free book. This first year was a great success with more than 300 people in attendance!

Literacy continued to be a focal point as laundromat libraries, originally set up by our partner SCARCE, were brought to new life at three local businesses. Kids often spend hours each month at laundromats. The libraries encourage kids to look at books and parents to read to their children. Each child is allowed to take a book home at the end of their visit. More than 100 books have been distributed since the summer and the hope is to expand to other locations in 2024.

“**The most successful way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to print.**”

Newman, Sanford, et al. “American’s Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy”; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000.

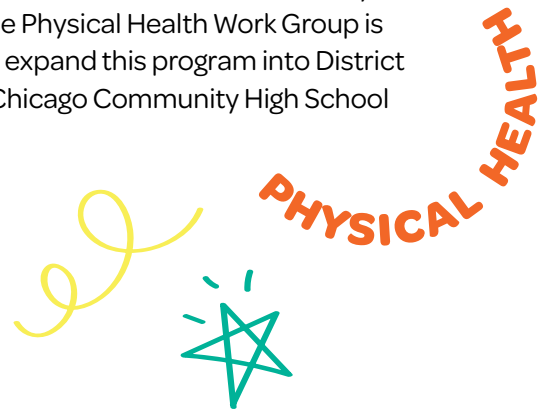


Youth and Family Health

focuses on families having a variety of opportunities to improve their physical health and emotional well-being.

Early in 2023 it was announced that Illinois residents on Medicaid would have to go through a redetermination process for the first time in years. There was much concern in West Chicago and throughout the region that those who are the most vulnerable would not have the information or resources to go through this process and therefore lose their medical insurance coverage. Alongside our partners, the DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform and the DuPage Health Coalition, WeGo Together for Kids hosted a county wide hybrid training for agencies, organizations, and businesses in direct contact with families. Interest in the event far exceeded expectation with almost 300 individuals registering and many more watching the recording after the event.

In an ongoing commitment to promote healthy eating choices to children and families, WGTK secured a grant to relaunch Small Bites, an after school snack club that teaches kids how to make nutritious choices and how to prepare healthy snacks. Small Bites was created by Healthy West Chicago and found much success when it debuted during the pandemic. Now Small Bites will be offered in every District 33 school with hundreds of kids having the opportunity to learn new skills and start to build healthy habits. The Physical Health Work Group is looking to expand this program into District 94 West Chicago Community High School in 2024.





MENTAL HEALTH

Partners have named mental health as the priority for services in West Chicago. Children and their families face many obstacles in obtaining mental health services including long wait lists, lack of Spanish speaking providers, high costs due to lack of any or quality insurance, difficulty with transportation to appointments, compounded traumas resulting in the need for higher level services and a stigma around needing mental health services.

WeGo Together for Kids was awarded two new grants from DuPage Foundation and the DuPage Community Transformation Partnership in 2023 focusing on mental health. One supports the work of our two Mental Health Clinicians working in District 33 and hopes to expand that work with the addition of social work interns and/or new part time staff. The other grant funds a new program aimed at parents of teens, teaching them about mental

health red flags, resources that are available and adolescent development.

In addition, with financial support from Kids Matter, four Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainings were held this year. Dozens of adults from WGTK partner organizations and community members were trained using role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to assess a mental health crisis; select interventions and provide initial help; and connect young people to professional, peer, social, and self-help care. Two of these trainings were held in Spanish, a rare opportunity in the current landscape of this curriculum.

While work is done to try to expand professional services available to West Chicago kids, it is crucial that the adults in their lives know how to respond to mental health needs.



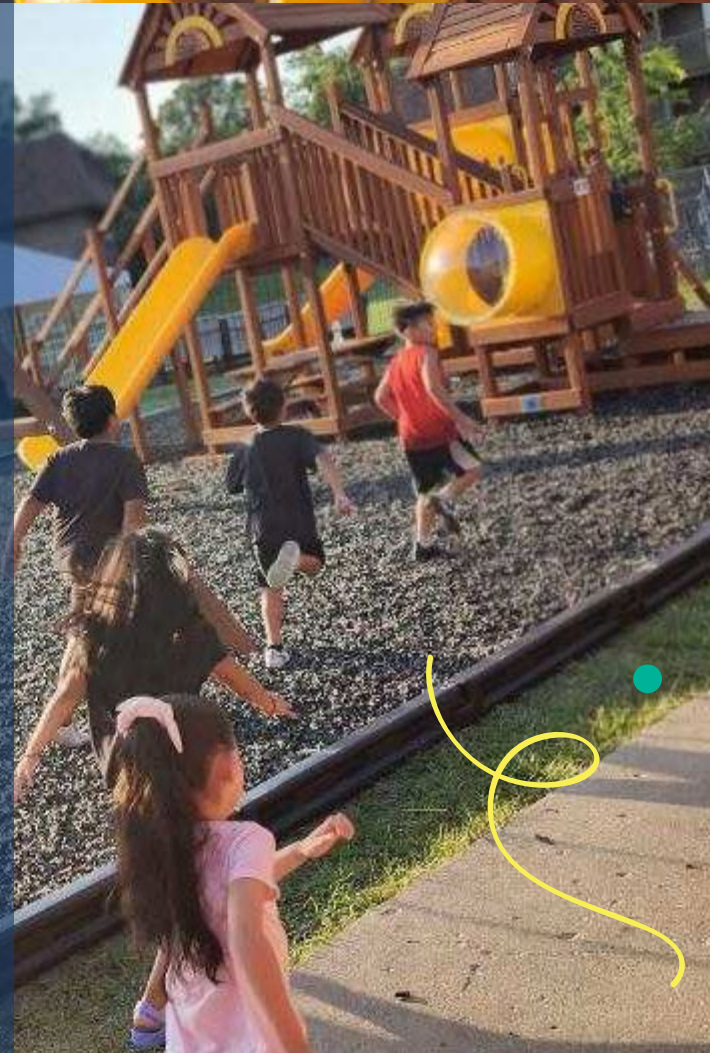


BUILDING JOY!

When the WeGo Together for Kids Physical Health Work Group learned that many low income children's activity level decreases during the summer months due to lack of access to recreational activities and parents working full time outside of the home, they made it their mission to make outdoor play more accessible through the building of a playground. The location chosen was Main Park Apartments due to its lack of current onsite equipment, not being within walking proximity to public parks and the trauma faced by complex residents late in 2022 when two buildings were destroyed by fire. Months of careful planning, sourcing and construction efforts went into building a vibrant and welcoming space for children.

On August 25th, the culmination of this journey was celebrated with a grand opening. The community eagerly gathered to witness the ribbon-cutting ceremony, marking the official opening of the playground. As the ribbon was cut, a wave of joy swept through the crowd. Kids and adults alike couldn't wait to explore the brand new playground with its thrilling swings, exciting slides, and challenging climbing areas. To make the day even sweeter, ice cream was served to all the attendees. It was a moment of pure joy for everyone involved.

The playground is a true testament to the power of community and collaboration to better the lives of children. It has become a vibrant hub of connection for families that will create lasting memories for years to come.





EARLY CHILDHOOD

The *Early Childhood* result area focuses on resources and support for families with children ages zero to eight years old to build strong relationships through access to play and learning opportunities. Those in the Early Childhood Work Group spent 2023 taking stock of how the needs of those with young children matched against the programs and resources offered. The DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform presented its Early Childhood research and practitioners agreed with the findings – that parents’ insufficient awareness of resources was of primary concern in West Chicago. Transportation was named a close second as an obstacle to getting and keeping young children and families enrolled in programming.

With their priorities set, the Early Childhood Work Group has been creatively brainstorming ideas to communicate better with families and to provide transportation assistance. The award of a Bright & Early Grant from the DuPage Foundation will springboard communication and awareness efforts through a series of events throughout West Chicago in early 2024. Short term and long term solutions to the transportation issue are being created and funds sought. Local, regional and statewide advocacy efforts are also being considered.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND ACCESS!

Community Engagement

refers to children's and families' sense of belonging in West Chicago, in which they are informed about and invested in contributing to the community. Throughout the year, WeGo Together for Kids actively promoted and participated in a wide range of community events created to do just that.

At Blooming Fest, WGTK and Healthy West Chicago partnered on a space that shared healthy eating tips and recipes as well as a fun vegetable garden relay race.

The West Chicago police department held a number of events in the summer including Touch-A-Truck, Freezer Pops from Cops and National Night Out. Many WGTK partners were present at these events to build trust with community members, share resources and have fun.

“In WeGo, if something happens you know who to call or if you don't, start with WeGo Together for Kids and they can connect you to the right person.”

- Community Partner

And don't forget the spooktacular Trunk or Treat event, where WGTK joined almost twenty other organizations in the West Chicago Library's parking lot to create a magical atmosphere with decorations, costumes and candy.

Through participation in events like these, WeGo Together for Kids continues to support the community and show West Chicago pride!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



SETTING CHILDREN UP
FOR SUCCESS!

On August 21, WeGo Together for Kids held its annual Back to School Event at Cantigny Park. With engaging activities for kids, valuable resources for parents and entertainment for all, it was a truly memorable occasion. The highlight of the event was the giveaway of over 1000 backpacks. Educare West DuPage preschool students and District 33 students from kindergarten to 8th grade were thrilled to receive these essential supplies, setting them up for a successful academic year ahead.

More than 25 WGTK partners were present to provide a wide range of activities for kids. From games and crafts to interactive exhibits, children had a blast exploring and engaging with the different partners. The Back to School Event also offered valuable resources to parents and caregivers on education, health, and community services. Throughout the night, entertainment was provided by Leman Middle School's Ballet Folklorico dancers, a string ensemble and a bubble performer.

This year's event included various health related partners who were prepared to help get kids ready for school. Families were given the opportunity to sign up for free hearing and vision screenings, vaccinations and haircuts as well as visit with the WIC mobile and learn about oral health from the Smile Squad.

Twenty-seven local businesses donated school supplies or made a financial donation. An Amazon Wishlist allowed individuals to donate supplies. Dozens of volunteers from partner organizations, business sponsors and the community worked for months to make this event a success. From supply collection and sorting to backpack packing and transportation to onsite hospitality and language interpretation, there was a job for everyone.

WeGo Together for Kids continues its commitment to making sure all kids have the tools they need for a new school year and that parents and caregivers feel supported by the community's resources and services.

“ I just want to say thank you for this amazing event for the families of West Chicago. Not only did you provide much needed resources & supplies, but you made us all feel loved, cared about, and valued. WeGo Together for Kids you are making such a difference in our community. Thank you to all of your partners. It means more to us than words can express. ”

- Parent

STABLE FAMILIES



The *Stable Families* result area helps to ensure that families have access to the resources they need to meet their basic needs and life goals. This takes shape in a variety of ways including:

- Distributing more than \$27,000 in financial assistance to ensure that families would be able to stay in their homes thanks to grants from the Seimer Institute and the Federal Government
- Referring families to community resources such as food pantries and legal assistance
- Partner providing ongoing case management services

The ultimate goal within this result area is for families to be empowered to navigate the resources available to help them reach their long-term goals.

The Food Access Work Group made strides in 2023 to collaborate in addressing food insecurity in West Chicago. A community food distribution calendar was created and distributed early in the calendar year. In the spring focus shifted to children's food needs over the summer when school is not in session. WeGo Together for Kids committed to be a distribution site through the Northern Illinois Food Bank's summer lunch program. Each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during the summer, kids came to St. Andrew's Lutheran Church for a free lunch. Partners staffed the lunch and provided not only hospitality, but handouts for the parents and caregivers on various resources offered. Each child who attended also got to take home a free book.

“ We deeply appreciate your generosity...because of your help, our family was able to feel safe and secure about remaining in our home and alleviated a major stressor. Your blessing will impact us for years to come. ”

– Parent



SPREADING WARMTH
AND KINDNESS!

Early in 2023, WeGo Together for Kids was approached by the West Chicago Park District's Foundation as they were looking for a partner to do a winter jacket drive. The decision was made to host the coat drive in April, marketing it as a "spring cleaning" opportunity for the community. The response was tremendous and over 200 jackets were collected. The Foundation also donated \$1000 to WGTK for the purchasing of additional jackets and a portion of WGTK's budget was redirected to this important project.

More than 300 jackets have been distributed to partners including School District 33, School District 94, Evangelical Child and Family Services, DuPage County Health Department, Educare West DuPage and Puente del Pueblo. The drive and distribution were made possible by the dedication and hard work of the Park District Foundation Board, numerous community volunteers and Andrea Garcia, the WGTK Communications Manager.

The impact of this jacket distribution goes beyond providing physical warmth. It sends a message to children and their families that their community cares and supports them.



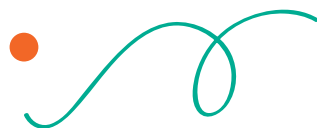


EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The final result area is *Emergency Preparedness*. WeGo Together for Kids is committed to making sure partners are aware of and prepared for emergencies. Unfortunately, WGTK's ability to rise up and work together in the face of an emergency was tested again in 2023. On November 30, a large fire caused extensive damage at a local apartment complex. With 22 households displaced and five people injured, WGTK partners sprung into action. The West Chicago Fire District, Police Department and Puente del Pueblo were first on scene. New WGTK partner, New Hope Methodist Church, agreed to serve as the Red Cross Emergency Shelter and more than 80 people were moved there within hours of the fire starting.

The morning brought news that almost all the apartments were a complete loss. Families were homeless and starting from nothing. WGTK partners, community members and others from across the metro area stepped forward with resources and support. Clothing donations poured in. Financial gifts were offered. Mental health services provided. School children tended to. Gift cards handed out. Warm meals served. In total, at least 76 organizations, businesses and agencies provided aid and hope in a coordinated and compassionate manner.

It will be months before all households find new homes. Puente del Pueblo and Casa Michoacan continue daily case management for those displaced. In 2024, WGTK will look for ways to strengthen and deepen collaboration when disaster strikes as well as ways to train and prepare partners and community members to respond.





Director, Molly Beck Dean, and WGTK Mental Health Clinician, Emeli Solis, with Earl and Kay Harbaugh (center) who funded a new youth mental health initiative in West Chicago.

2023 FUNDERS

WeGo Together for Kids' mission is only forwarded because of the amazing funders who believe in this vision for the children of West Chicago. Thank you to all of these entities who supported WGTK in 2023.

United Way Metro Chicago

Siemer Institute

McCormick Foundation

DuPage Foundation

DuPage Community Transformation Partnerships

DuPage Foundation's Bright & Early DuPage Initiative

West Chicago Park District Foundation

Hawthorne's Backyard

West Chicago Rotary Club

This year, relationships with area businesses were expanded with an invitation to support the WeGo Together for Kids Back to School Event. The following business sponsors and partners gifted the event with school supplies, financial contributions and volunteers. Thank you for your dedication to the kids of West Chicago!

American Standard Circuits
Bank of America
Beacon Roofing Supply
Buck Services
Citizens for Hirschauer
Citizens for Karina Villa
Community Fellowship Church
Costco – Bloomingdale
Costco – St. Charles
Delnor Health & Fitness Center
Dynamic Utilities Solutions

Elgin Sweepers
Elite Printing Pros
Epsilon
Evans & Sons Blacktop
Faith Community Church
FNBC Bank & Trust
Form Tech
FXI
Graham Packaging
Groot
Hawthorne's Backyard
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh
Inside Out

Jelsert
Lakeshore Recycling Systems (LRS)
Land Care
Marian Chicago
Nationwide
Norix
Pepsico
Porcayo & Associates
Sandi Llano and Associates
SEWA International Chicago Chapter
Target – St. Charles



Staff from Dynamic Utility Solutions brought five of their large trucks to haul 1200 backpacks from our storage location to the event.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS



We are thrilled to have more than 60 partners on our roster for 2023, including seven new partners! In 2023, 39 partners were engaged in one or more of our work groups, committees and planning teams. Organizations gather in-person or on Zoom the first Thursday of each month for partner meetings. This is a time of networking, learning, dreaming and fun.

Access Community Health Network
 Boy Scouts of America
 *Casa Michoacan
 Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)
 City of West Chicago
 City of West Chicago Police Department
 DayOne Pact, Child and Family Connections DuPage
 *DuPage Children’s Museum
 Dupage County
 DuPage County Health Department
 DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform
 DuPage Habitat for Humanity
 DuPage Health Coalition
 Easter Seals
 Educare West DuPage
 Evangelical Child & Family Agency
 Family Focus
 FSS of Metropolitan Family Services
 Glen Arbor Church
 H.A.S.
 H.O.M.E. DuPage
 Healthy West Chicago

Literacy DuPage
 Loaves & Fishes Community Services
 Metropolitan Family Services
 Mexican Cultural Center
 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
 *National Hispanic Suicide Prevention Network
 Neighborhood Food Pantries
 *New Hope United Methodist
 Northern Illinois Food Bank
 Northwestern Memorial Healthcare Outreach
 *Peace Jam
 People Made Visible/Gallery 200
 People’s Resource Center
 Puente del Pueblo
 Representative Maura Hirschauer’s office
 Republic Bank
 SCARCE
 Senator Karina Villa’s office
 St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church
 Teen Parent Connection
 The Garden Works Project
 *Timber Lake Apartments
 United Way of Metro Chicago
 University of Illinois Extension
 VNA Health Care
 Wayne Township
 Wayne/Winfield Area Youth/Family Services (WAYS)
 West Chicago City Museum
 West Chicago Community High School District 94

“WeGo Together for Kids is like no other [collaboration]. Because of [partner] meetings, we have the awareness of all the programs and resources available in the community.”

– Community Partner

West Chicago Elementary School District 33
 West Chicago Park District
 West Chicago Public Library District
 Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce
 Western DuPage Special Recreation Association
 Wheaton Bible Church
 Wheaton College/ CODA Music Program
 Willow Creek Community Church
 Winfield Township
 World Relief Chicagoland
 *Youth Outlook
 YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

*NEW PARTNER IN 2023



2023 Steering Committee

Ben Weseloh

West Chicago Public Library

Kyle Reschke

Wheaton Bible Church

Brittney Walker

District 94

Mila Tsaglais

DuPage County
Health Department

Dave Sabathne

Western DuPage
Chamber of Commerce

Robyn Arms

West Chicago Police Department

Gina Radun

West Chicago Park District

Sarah Norton

District 33

Joshua Simmons

United Way of Metro Chicago

Suzanne Baber

Teen Parent Connection

Kara Murphy

DuPage Health Coalition

Darby Pool/Allison Delgado

Metropolitan Family Services



WeGo Together for Kids grieved the unexpected death of Darby Pool in 2023.

Darby worked for Metropolitan Family Services for nearly 20 years, starting as a teacher and eventually becoming the DuPage Associate Director of Early Learning. She was passionate about the impact of early childhood education and making sure that children and families were safe, supported, and accepted. Darby was active in WGTK partner meetings and served on the Steering Committee.

In November 2023, MFS dedicated the Bensenville Early Learning Center's new playground in Darby's name.



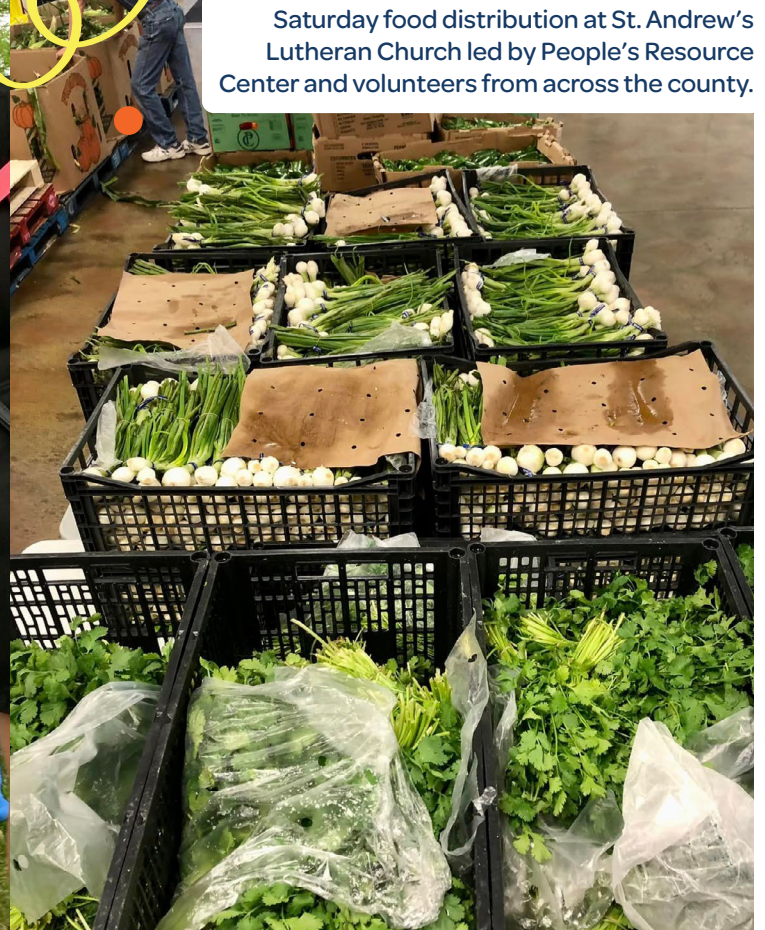
West Chicago Police Community Officer Arms hands out cool treats on a summer day during their "Pops with Cops" program sponsored by Jel-Sert.



Volunteers at our Back to School Event prepare to hand out the last back pack!



District 33's Birth to 3 end of the year celebration



Saturday food distribution at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church led by People's Resource Center and volunteers from across the county.



WeGo
Together
For Kids



fb.com/WeGoTogetherWC @wegotogetherforkids

wegotogetherforkids.com