

# 20 23

FINAL REPORT



# SAFE AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

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# 01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SAFE (Streets Are For Everybody) Ambassadors are the Chicago Department of Transportation's (CDOT) safety education and engagement team who provide expertise and skills to keep the program culturally relevant for Chicagoans of all ages, and innovative to respond to the needs of our communities.

Throughout the years, CDOT's education and engagement team has been rebranded and rebooted multiple times, but it upholds the same core values and mission: to educate all Chicagoans on how to walk, bike, scoot, take public transit, and drive safely. We are proud of how the SAFE Ambassadors program has grown and we are excited to continue expanding our reach and impact across the city.

This 2023 SAFE Program final report provides insights into our 22nd year of traffic safety education and engagement activities and about our efforts to meet our goals.



# 489 TOTAL EVENTS

**56**  
Public Education Campaigns

**13** Events for SENIORS

**73**  
EDUCATION Booth/Displays

Helmet/Bike Light Giveaways **9**



**28** COMMUNITY BIKE RIDES

**12** Junior Ambassadors HIRED

**89** Engagements at Schools

**70** Schools Visited

**9** BIKE CHICAGO EVENTS

**5,465** Students Educated

**230** Classrooms Visited

**119** Events at Parks

**103** Learn to Ride Classes

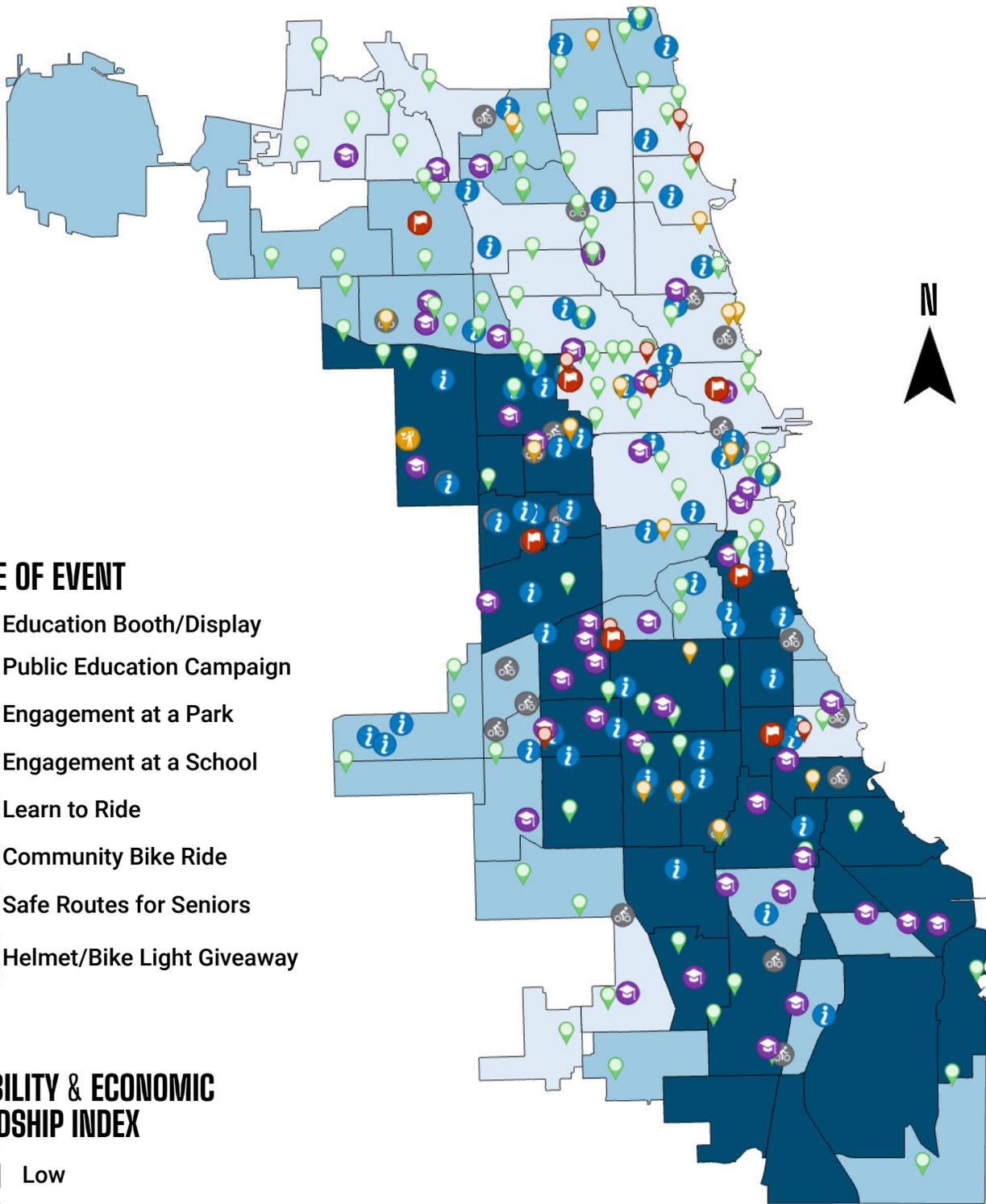
30 Kids Classes Facilitated

101 Kids Participated

73 Adult Classes Facilitated

284 Adults Participated

# MAP OF EVENTS



## TYPE OF EVENT

-  Education Booth/Display
-  Public Education Campaign
-  Engagement at a Park
-  Engagement at a School
-  Learn to Ride
-  Community Bike Ride
-  Safe Routes for Seniors
-  Helmet/Bike Light Giveaway

## MOBILITY & ECONOMIC HARDSHIP INDEX

-  Low
-  Medium
-  High

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

# 02 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 2023

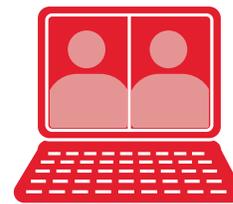


**Chicago's SAFE Ambassadors Program is continuously developing new resources, piloting new activities, and testing new approaches to support initiatives and projects as they arise. The following are four 2023 feature initiatives where the Ambassadors stepped up to the challenge to address needs and to implement thoughtful engagement practices.**

# BIKE CHICAGO



Bike Chicago bikes distributed to Learn to Ride students



24

Online Bike Chicago education workshops

Bike Chicago is an initiative set in place to distribute 5,000 bicycles, as well as safety and maintenance equipment by 2026 to age and income-eligible residents. To incorporate an essential education component in this initiative during its first year, the Ambassadors developed a comprehensive and interactive bike education module that was conducted in-person to ensure that every Chicagoan receiving a brand-new bike was also equipped with the essential education to feel confident biking throughout the city.

During Bike Chicago's second distribution year, the SAFE Ambassador team was instrumental in streamlining the bicycle pick-up process and building capacity for more distribution. Between January and September of 2023, 1,123 bikes were distributed at nine events. The Ambassadors compiled and packaged a virtual education module based on the in-person education module developed the previous year, facilitating 24 Zoom meetings throughout the year to educate Bike Chicago recipients about safety checks, proper helmet fitting, safe riding habits, and navigating cycling infrastructure. The online education format allowed the Ambassadors to prepare recipients for what to expect when picking up their new bikes and to ask any questions they might have before attending a distribution event.

In between the facilitation of virtual education and distribution events, members of the SAFE Ambassador team stayed in contact with applicants, encouraging them to sign up for virtual education sessions, confirming their heights and accessibility needs, and answering questions.

During the summer, Junior Ambassadors assisted the team at distribution events, providing helmet fittings and ensuring the bikes were ready to ride. Recipients received an appropriately sized bike, helmet (with personalized adjustment), front and rear lights, bell, U-lock, chain lubricant, and a multi-tool.

In addition to recipients chosen from 2022's pool of applicants, students who completed one of the SAFE Learn to Ride (LTR) courses and met Bike Chicago's eligibility requirements were also selected to receive new bikes. 64 Bike Chicago bikes were distributed to LTR students, many of whom brought their new bikes to later classes and events that the Ambassadors supported.



## WHAT'S ON THE ROAD AHEAD

Basic bike maintenance classes are planned for Bike Chicago recipients in partnership with non-profit bike shops The Recyclery, Bikes N' Roses, West Town Bikes, and Working Bikes.



# ENGAGEMENT WITH NEW ARRIVALS



Comprehensive traffic education for recent migrants



5 Shelters actively engaged by Ambassadors

In 2023, Chicago experienced an unprecedented number of arrivals, mostly from Central and South America, seeking humanitarian assistance. Knowing that our new neighbors needed to reach multiple destinations across the city to receive services and support, our Ambassadors' team compiled and facilitated comprehensive traffic safety education for recent migrants, encompassing crucial topics such as vehicle ownership, road regulations for cyclists and motorists, as well as fundamental knowledge about Chicago's street infrastructure. Since August, we have actively engaged with five shelters (of the 15 run by the City of Chicago), with plans for further expansion to increase mobility options for migrants.

Inquiries about bike donations have emerged among new arrivals in response to their need for reliable, cost-effective transportation options. Thanks to the invaluable contributions of volunteers from Working Bikes, West Town Bikes, Bikes N' Roses, Bike Grid Now, and other community groups, numerous migrants have received bicycles, with continued requests pouring in. Through the Ambassador's

safety presentations and the ongoing generosity of bike donors, the aim is to bolster access to employment opportunities, heighten safety awareness, and foster deeper community integration.



## WHAT'S ON THE ROAD AHEAD

- Conduct a survey to continue refining programming to support new arrivals.
- Translate and develop more culturally appropriate mobility education resources in Spanish.
- Identify more effective ways to reach this population as they settle into permanent housing.
- Coordinate volunteers to provide bike maintenance at shelters with large fleets of bikes that are not currently being used due to lack of maintenance.

## KIDS LEARN TO RIDE

This year, the Junior Ambassadors in collaboration with the SAFE Ambassadors, successfully conducted 30 Kids Learn to Ride classes where 101 children participated, doubling the number of kids who participated last year. This year's program expansion also included offering classes at four new Chicago Park District locations to provide more options across the city: Portage Park and Humboldt Park on the city's Northwest side, McKinley Park on the Southwest Side, and Washington Park Southeast side.

This program stands out as a free resource that promotes independence, presence of mind, and confidence while providing an empowering opportunity for youth mentorship and employment. Although highly recommended, bike ownership is not an impediment for kids to sign up for the class; through a collaboration with Working Bikes, a local bike shop, children's bikes were donated to our program in 2022 to build a fleet of loaner bikes for children who do not own bikes and want to participate in the class.



Kids Learn to Ride classes



Children participated



New Chicago park district locations



### WHAT'S ON THE ROAD AHEAD

- Kids Learn to Ride classes will be offered year-round starting in 2024.



## CHICAGO MOBILITY COLLABORATIVE

Starting in 2023, the SAFE Ambassadors have led the efforts to co-facilitate and improve the reach of the Chicago Mobility Collaborative (CMC), CDOT's largest public forum related to walking, biking, transit, public spaces, mobility justice, and accessibility. CMC meets quarterly at different locations and conducts convenings in a hybrid format.



The SAFE Ambassadors are instrumental in the logistics that make this event possible, as they set and operate all the equipment needed to run a successful hybrid meeting, in addition to tabling at each meeting to provide general information about the program, and co-facilitate community conversations with representatives of CDOT or neighborhood partners.

# 03 PROGRAM IMPACT

**With twenty-two years of experience, the SAFE Ambassadors program continues leading the efforts within the Chicago Department of Transportation in traffic safety education, relationship-building, and inclusive engagement practices. The following narrative describes a more detailed overview of how our work has evolved throughout the years and the impact that it has generated across our Chicago communities.**

# SAFE LEARN TO RIDE

The program achieved many milestones in 2023 including building capacity and designing a curriculum to offer three levels of bike-riding education. The following is a snapshot of 2023:



**615 class requests** came in between May and September this year.\*



We registered **523 Chicagoans** for a spot in one of our 54 scheduled classes.



**284 students** ages 13-75 attended class for the first time—a **60% increase over last year**.



**47.5% of LTR participants registered to subsequent classes** to continue building their bike riding skills and confidence.



At the Beginner Learn to Ride level, (individuals participating in this class have limited or no experience riding a bicycle) we held 48 classes with 169 students—7 more classes than last year. This year, 69% of our students learned to ride for the first time ever or after a lengthy lapse in riding, including a father who had taught his son to ride but needed our help to learn for himself because his son wanted to go on bike rides together. Among our program upgrades was fine-tuning our teaching method to instill in students finding their ability to balance, even while standing still. We also improved our methods to emphasize the habit of stopping with the hand brakes as a way for students to be in control of their new experience and newfound mode of transportation.

At the Skill-Builder level, (participants know how to ride a bicycle but want to improve their signaling, turning and other bike-handling skills on a car-free course) we led 12 classes with 65 students—twice the classes and more

than twice as many students (27 last year). Most of these students (45 students) were Beginner Learn to Ride level alumni (one of them in 2017, when we didn't have a next class to check out); and 9 of them took this course twice.

Our Road Ride classes (most advanced class level where participants' goal is to build more confidence riding on the street) more than tripled this year (13 in 2023 compared to four in 2022) and we worked with 50 students, compared to 18 last year. 14 of those 50 students progressed all the way through our three-level series; and eight started working with us at the Skill-Builder level. Among our most distinguished students at Road Ride this year were a 45-year-old man who had learned to ride for the first time ever only 24 days earlier (he re-took the course a couple weeks later as well); and Michelle Smith, longtime former Alder of the 43rd Ward, whose bicycle infrastructure we highlighted during the route.



**LEARN TO RIDE CLASS CAPACITY**

Our classes have limited capacity because they are intentionally designed to be facilitated in small groups to provide the most one-on-one attention to each student. Individuals who are not able to be accommodated to one of the classes are placed on a waiting list and given priority once registration opens up.



**BEGINNER LEVEL**

7 more classes than 2022

**SKILL BUILDER LEVEL**

Twice the classes and more than twice as many students as 2022

**ROAD RIDE CLASSES**

More than tripled in 2023

# SAFE LEARN TO RIDE IMPACT

One of the most important facets of the 2023 Learn to Ride season has been the acquisition of our own fleet of bicycles. The SAFE Ambassadors received a donation of 34 decommissioned Chicago Police Department bikes, which were evaluated and adjusted, cutting the seat posts to ensure that they could be lowered to offer the widest range of saddle heights to make our equipment as accessible as possible for all Chicagoans.

Owning our own fleet of bikes increases the opportunity for more people to be able to comfortably participate in Learn to Ride classes when in the past we were limited to using Divvy bikes, which are often too big and heavy for some people, especially to those who have never learned to ride before. As a result, we were able to offer the class to people who are under five feet in height, including adults and teenagers.



## SUCCESS STORIES

This summer, we were able to offer Learn to Ride to 53 students who would previously have been at a disadvantage due to our restrictions on bike sizes. A 4'9" student was able to pedal away easily after our beginners lesson in Spanish. This same student, the 56-year-old mother of an avid cyclist, had been unable to even try learning the previous year when our equipment was restricted to Divvy bikes. Later in the summer, two 4'8" people learned to ride. Another 4'9" student also succeeded when taking the class with several friends thanks to our bilingual staff and accessible fleet of bikes.

In 2023, we also welcomed more teenage students than ever before: 27, with 10 of those being 13-year-olds.

“Yesterday’s class was so great. I feel my confidence as a bike rider grow with everyone.”

—A.K.



“This program has been life changing, I can’t express how grateful I am!”

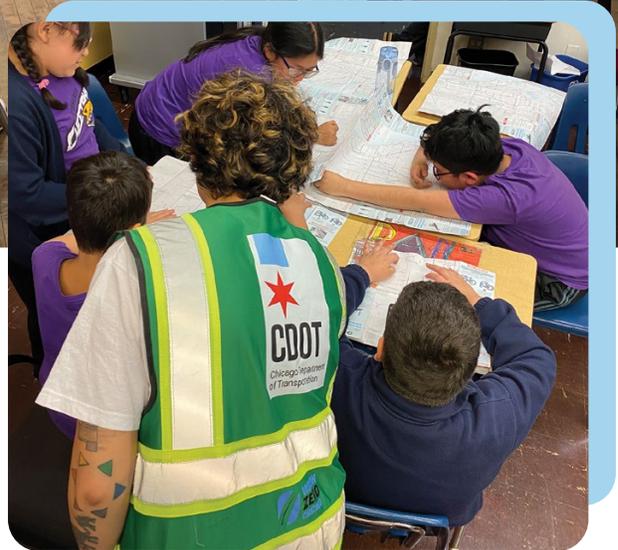
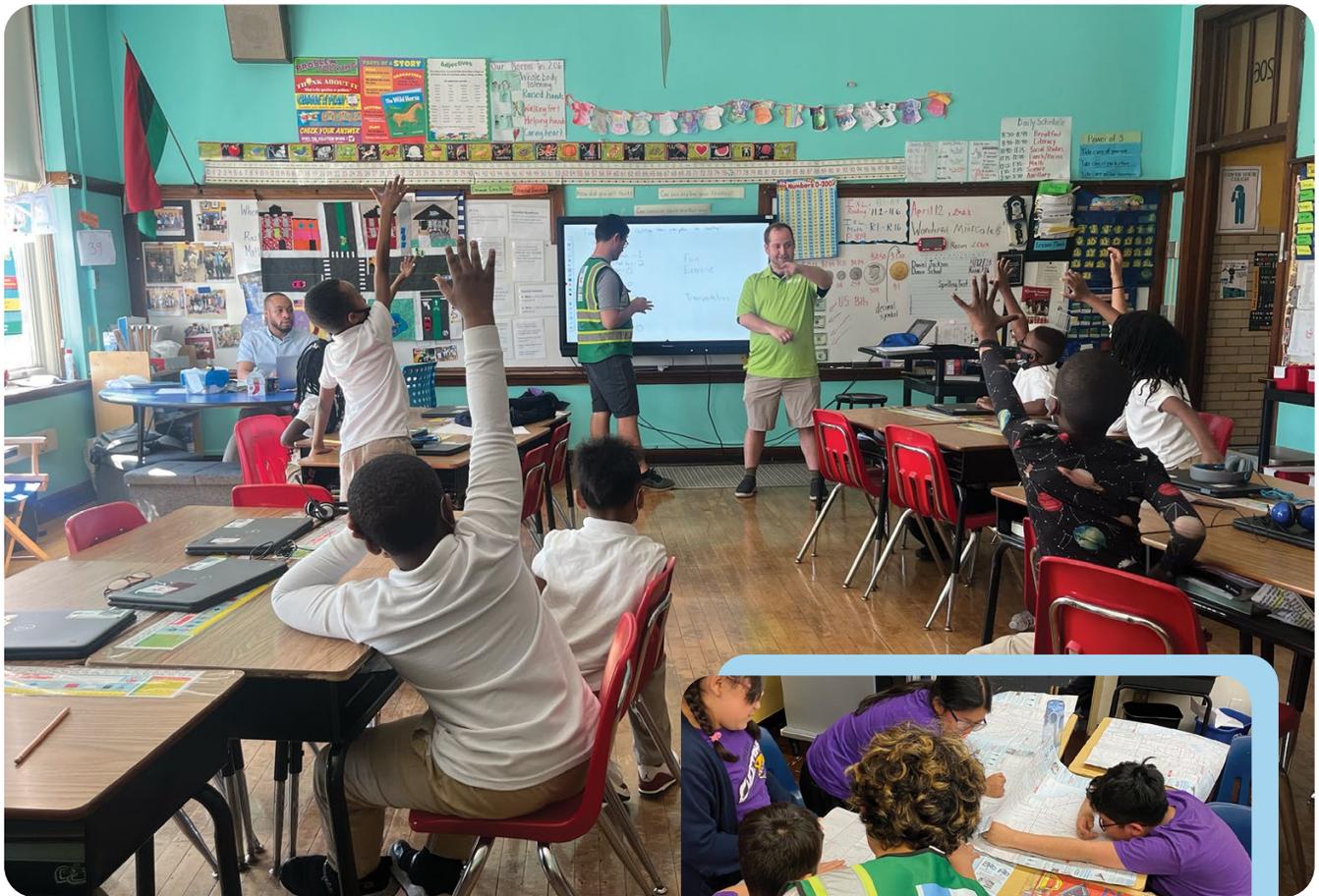
—L.R.



## WHAT’S ON THE ROAD AHEAD

- Develop a maintenance plan for our 34-bicycle fleet.
- Strategize and resolve storage details.
- Secure a reliable supply of helmets that allows students to keep them and avoids having to clean them ourselves.
- Find a headquarters spot with storage and options for hosting classes year-round.
- Also in the works are Road Ride courses in different parts of town to offer easier access for students and incorporating new infrastructure in the classic course for next summer.



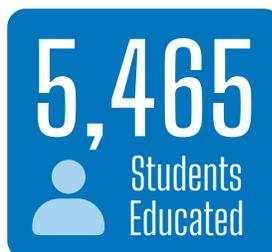


## SAFE SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

SAFE School Programming comprises of classroom visits to second, fifth, and driver's education classes where we facilitate activities, lessons, and field trips designed to engage students attending those grades. This year our team visited 230 classrooms and conducted 89 different events in 70 schools, reaching a total of 5,465 students.

During our classroom visits we explored the topic of "getting around" with elementary school students, focusing on walking safety for second graders and biking safety for fifth graders. Our lessons invited young Chicagoans to consider the risks and rewards associated with sharing public spaces such as streets and sidewalks.

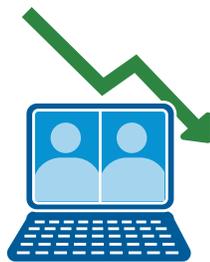
In addition to classroom visits, our team partners up with schools to host fun and interactive events such as walking and biking to school, bike skill classes, and parent transportation safety presentations.





## SAFE SCHOOL PROGRAMMING IMPACT AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

As we emerge from the pandemic, the SAFE Ambassadors saw a drastic decrease in requests for digital curriculum at schools, while in-person activity requests increased by 63%. With an increase for in-person programming, we have limited capacity to conduct in-person visits, yet we understand the value of attending those schools and building long-term relationships with teachers, the administration, and students. The team is identifying options to maintain a wide reach while still deepening the impact of our program in specific communities.



Drastic decrease in requests for digital curriculum



In-person activity requests increased by 63%

### WHAT'S ON THE ROAD AHEAD

Develop a more comprehensive train-the-trainer module to work more closely with teachers so that they can increase their confidence in facilitating our SAFE School virtual curriculum in their classrooms and report back to our team for feedback.



## SUCCESS STORIES

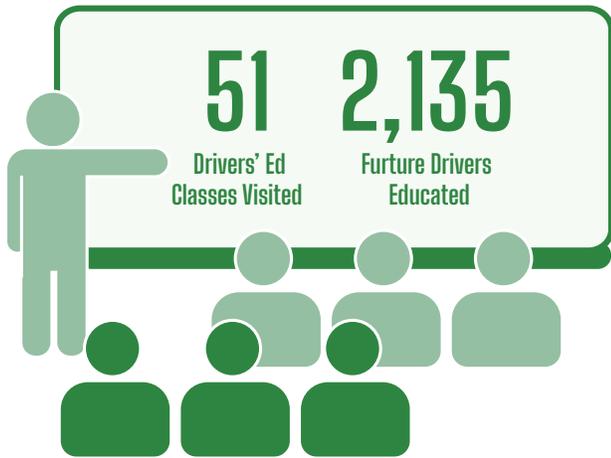
Ambassadors worked with Gateway to the Great Outdoors (GGO), a non-profit organization dedicated to “partnering with low-income public schools to provide extensive environmental, outdoor, and STEM education,” to provide on-bike experiences for students at GGO partner school. During the school year, Ambassadors ran bike clinics at two South Side elementary schools where students learned to ride a bike, practiced biking skills, and participated in a group ride with their classmates to a neighborhood beach. GGO provided bicycles and helmets for the clinics and rides, and Ambassadors provided education and support for multiple classes in each partner school.

During the summer, GGO moved their bikes to Yates Elementary school in Humboldt Park, where Ambassadors ran a four-week program for students participating in the school’s summer programming. Participants ranging from grades three to eight had the opportunity to receive the Ambassadors’ off-bike education, learn to ride (for those who didn’t already know), practice skills, tour neighborhood bike infrastructure around their school, and end the summer with a group ride on the Bloomingdale Trail.

Looking to next year, the Ambassadors have a training scheduled with GGO staff with the goal of improving their organization’s capacity to support students at more of their partner schools, and we look forward to expanding our work with them as well.

# SAFE SCHOOL PROGRAMMING IMPACT AT HIGH SCHOOLS

SAFE Ambassadors visited drivers' education classrooms within CPS high schools. Over the course of 2023, Ambassadors visited 51 high school classes and educated 2,135 future drivers.



The Ambassadors' mobility education for high schoolers emphasizes the "modal hierarchy" of transit planning, wherein the most vulnerable road users are given the highest priority when new infrastructure is designed and implemented. As CDOT continues to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure on Chicago's roads, it is imperative that new drivers are made aware of what they will encounter behind the wheel.

Ambassadors provide information about traffic calming projects such as curb bump-outs and chicanes, and discuss different types of bike infrastructure, among other relevant topics.

This year, Ambassadors showed videos of the most common types of motorist-on-pedestrian and motorist-on-cyclist crashes, and shared best practices for drivers to avoid these crashes, while encouraging a culture change and awareness of dangerous behavior. Ambassador presentations also included a targeted discussion of the dangers of speeding and the environmental harm caused by vehicle emissions.



# JUNIOR AMBASSADORS

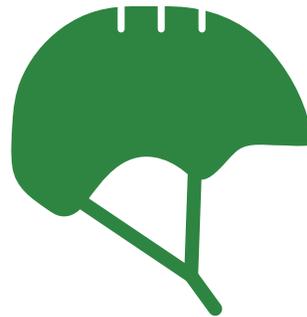
The Junior Ambassadors is a unique peer-to-peer mentorship and employment opportunity for young Chicagoans, sponsored by the Chicago Park District and co-facilitated by the SAFE Ambassadors. As the sponsor of the program, the Chicago Park District hires youth recreational leaders to lead traffic safety education. Our SAFE Ambassadors team trains those recreational leaders to facilitate presentations, activities, and Learn to Ride classes for children aged 6 to 12 years old registered at Chicago Park District summer camps.



# JUNIOR AMBASSADORS IMPACT

This year, 12 Junior Ambassadors were hired to become leaders and mentors to younger kids; they visited 87 communities over the span of ten weeks and educated a total of 5,751 children and teens about bicycle safety including bike inspections and helmet-fitting demonstrations.

Since the bicycle is an essential vehicle for Junior Ambassadors to access park locations and facilitate bike skills and safety demonstrations, our SAFE Program collaborated with Working Bikes to extend the Cycle of Power application to them. Cycle of Power is an initiative led by Working Bikes to provide donated bicycles to people who need an inexpensive alternative to access employment, education, and other resources across the city. Some of this year's Junior Ambassadors received a free bicycle through this program to work during the summer season and were able to keep it afterwards.



5,751

Children and Teens Educated About Bike Safety



12 Junior Ambassadors Hired

# 04 EXPANDING THE PROGRAM'S ONLINE REACH

Social media has been a way for the SAFE Ambassadors to educate Chicagoans on transportation safety and in 2023 we continued using short form videos and photo content to do just that. A new approach we implemented this year was leaning more on Instagram and Facebook Stories to keep Chicagoans updated on what the program is doing day to day.



# SOCIAL MEDIA



Throughout the four social media platforms we use, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and TikTok, we reached 76,903 unique accounts. In total we posted 490 Posts and Stories between all four social media platforms. With a more consistent posting schedule than previous years, we saw a 17% growth in the number of followers for Instagram and Facebook, our two most followed platforms.

Building community has been an integral part of the SAFE Ambassador program this year and that goes for social media as well. Engaging and interacting with community partners and program participants with the use of social media has been a way for the program to build those greater lasting connections.



*One of the reasons we moved to Chicago was to be in a city where it's possible to be less reliant on our cars to get around. From the outset, we were determined to be urban cyclists and learn to be safe and confident riding in city traffic. To celebrate our achievements and invest in our new lifestyle, I decided to get a bike more suited to my needs. I picked up my new @jamisbikes coda S2 last weekend and I'm over the moon! I love her so much!*

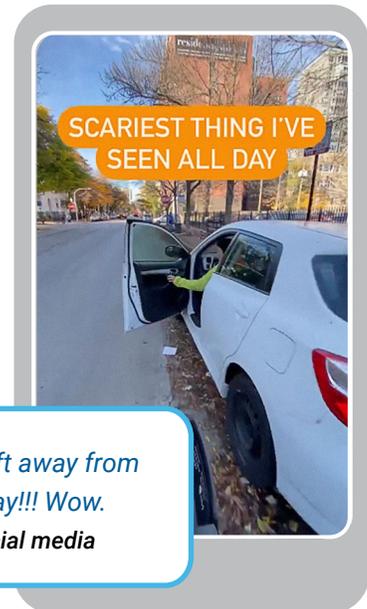
*I also love saving money on gas, having more freedom in getting around, and supporting the fossil fuel industry that much less.*

*Thanks to Uptown Bikes for getting me all set up and answering all my questions, and to the @chicagosafe program for helping us get started biking safely in Chicago.*

**-Susi Brister, a Learn to Ride student, via Instagram**

This and other posts from program participants shows how having a presence on social media can expand in-person connections to the online world and increase awareness of SAFE programming.

Our social media post with the greatest traction was our "Halloween Dooring Video", a five-second video about riding in the "door zone". This post reached 7,400 views, 221 Likes, 19 shares, and four comments.



*I just learned the 3 ft away from parked car rule today!!! Wow.*  
**-@smyleeland via social media**



# CANTV EPISODES

In 2023, the Chicago SAFE Ambassadors produced a total of seven CanTV episodes, a 50% increase from the last year. Such episodes include four Chicago Mobility Collaborative meeting recordings and three Transportation Safety Education Episodes.

CanTV has become instrumental in the way our program is furthering its reach to Chicago residents by leveraging CanTV's 1 million viewers through their five local channels. Being able to produce more episodes is going to be crucial to meet our virtual engagement goals moving forward, and more staff members are getting CanTV certified to be able to operate the equipment and edit the content.



**CanTV**

CanTV is a public access television network providing Chicago residents and groups with a voice on cable television by offering video training, access to their facilities, equipment and channel time. The Chicago SAFE Ambassadors utilize CanTV as a place to create and share long form educational transportation safety content.



### Episodes Produced

**CHICAGO MOBILITY COLLABORATIVE**

- December 2022 (Q4) Quarterly meeting
- March 2023 (Q1) Quarterly meeting
- June 2023 (Q2) Quarterly meeting
- September 2023 (Q3) Quarterly meeting

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**TRANSPORTATION SAFETY EDUCATION**

- School Pickup & Dropoff Best Practices
- Infrastructure Explained

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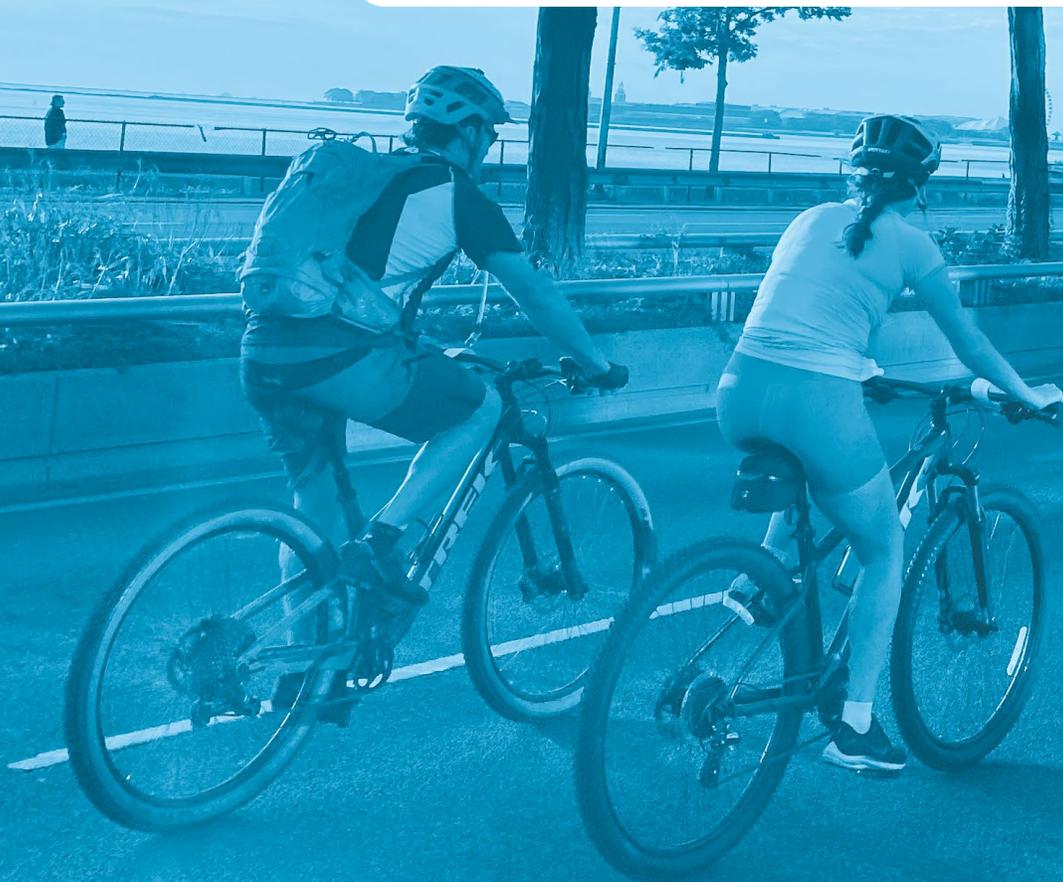
**CDOT EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS**

- Chicago 811 – Call before you dig!



# 05 LOOKING AHEAD

**In 2023 the SAFE Program wrapped up the first phase of its internal review and transition. During this first phase, we focused on the strategic direction of the program and on building our team's capacity. We hired two additional positions, drafted our first-ever workplan, established new curriculum for activities that have been piloted during previous years, and developed program goals that will guide our program's work moving forward.**



# SAFE PROGRAM GOALS

1

## GOAL 1

Reduce the frequency and severity of traffic crashes

2

## GOAL 2

Increase the use of sustainable modes of transportation

3

## GOAL 3

Build trust between CDOT and Chicagoans

4

## GOAL 4

Build public awareness around transportation projects and policy initiatives

For our programs' second phase review during 2024 we will target improving our evaluation methods, creating a workplan progress report, and identifying the initiatives where we need to scale broadly and the ones where we need to dive deeper. Among the activities we are looking to restructure and re-evaluate to broaden our reach and improve our impact are our senior outreach events, and child passenger safety clinics.

Our SAFE School Programming will go through an evaluation process to deepen our impact, expand our resources, and improve our educational materials. The Ambassadors are also looking forward to being able to provide year-round Learn to Ride classes, to increase the opportunity for Chicagoans to stay active during the cold months and educate more individuals regarding safe mobility options.

With more than 18,000 new arrivals seeking the opportunity to stay in Chicago and the number increasing daily, our SAFE Program remains committed to develop a new cultural appropriate curriculum and program to reach and engage this group of new Chicagoans around traffic safety so they can become more confident walking, biking, and eventually driving across the city. Implementing engagement and education strategies among new arrivals will require building strong partnerships with other City Departments, social service agencies, and community groups. Our team's priority is to keep this population safe, help them feel welcome, and ensure that they have a better understanding of the infrastructure they'll encounter in Chicago.



**The SAFE Ambassadors are looking forward to another dynamic, interactive, and challenging season in 2024. We will continue relying on our community partners, supporters, and sponsors to reach more people, contribute to the reduction of fatal and severe crashes, increase the use of sustainable modes of transportation, build and strengthen trust between CDOT and Chicagoans, and raise awareness about traffic safety campaigns, projects, and initiatives across the city.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With sincere gratitude, we recognize the contributions of the following agencies, and organizations that supported our team and played an essential role in making this 2023 SAFE Ambassadors' season possible:

### Program Funders

Chicago Department of Transportation  
Illinois Department of Transportation

### Sponsors

Abus  
Divvy/Lyft  
Lime  
Rush Hospital  
Swedish Hospital  
Spin  
The Sock Guy

### Interagency Partners

Chicago City Clerk  
Chicago Park District  
Chicago Public Schools

### Community Collaborators

Bikes 'n' Roses  
Boxing Out Negativity  
Cleverhood  
Communities in Schools (CIS)  
Equiticity  
Garfield Park Community Council  
Harmony Community Church  
Lawndale Christian Health Center  
Northwest Center of Chicago  
Oak Street Health  
Senior Suites of Austin  
Southwest Collective  
Think Outside da Block  
We Keep You Rollin'  
Working Bikes

