

February 2024



ARLINGTON'S GUARANTEE

pilot evaluation



ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES

ARLINGTON'S GUARANTEE

You are valued.
You belong here.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report documents the evaluation of the 2021-2023 Arlington's Guarantee demonstration pilot launched by Arlington Community Foundation and the Arlington County Department of Human Services. It summarizes the history leading up to the pilot; roles of key partners involved; the pilot design and implementation process; and qualitative and quantitative impacts of unrestricted cash on participants' ability to meet basic needs, employment, income, family, mental and physical well-being, and sense of belonging. It includes observations on the sample subgroups, impacts of optional coaching on participant outcomes, and implementation lessons learned. It concludes with next steps and policy implications at the national and state levels.

**"IT'S MADE ME
FEEL THAT
I EXIST
IN THE
COMMUNITY."**

*Arlington's Guarantee Participant**

**Throughout this report, stock photos and pseudonyms (or no name) will be used to protect participant identities.*

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF ARLINGTON'S GUARANTEE FINDINGS

Significant findings for participants relative to the comparison group are summarized as follows:

- Increased employment levels and incomes. In addition, participants were able to reduce overtime or weekend work to spend time pursuing certifications, training or better jobs.
- Participants were better able to meet their basic needs, such as food and transportation.
- Improved physical and mental health
- Increased parental involvement in their children's lives and time spent with children
- Increased sense of belonging and connection to the community
- Increases in participants who had bank accounts, and decreases in borrowing money from friends, family or banks and using payday loans

The destabilizing effects of high inflation, post-pandemic lifting of the eviction moratoriums, and the insurmountable housing affordability pressures in Arlington dampened the financial and housing stability outcomes.

- While many participants made progress paying down debt, the aggregate household debt actually increased.
- Participants continued to be severely rent-burdened, with the median household paying at least 54% of their income in rent. This is especially noteworthy because 78% of participants had local Housing Grants. Even so, it is often challenging for households to find housing in Arlington at or under HUD's maximum allowable rent levels.

When asked to identify how they and their families were doing now compared to 18 months ago, 98% of participants indicated that they were much better off or somewhat better off, while less than half of comparison households (49%) reported that they were better off than they were 18 months ago.

Overall, the findings of Arlington's Guarantee reflect what is borne out over and over again in similar pilots across the country: regular, predictable monthly cash with no strings attached as a supplement to more prescriptive public benefits significantly improves the wellbeing of low-income parents, their children, and the communities in which they live. They are able to engage more in work and career endeavors, in community events, and in their children's lives. Their health and stress levels are improved, and they have more bandwidth to think beyond getting by today to set goals and plan for tomorrow.

BACKGROUND

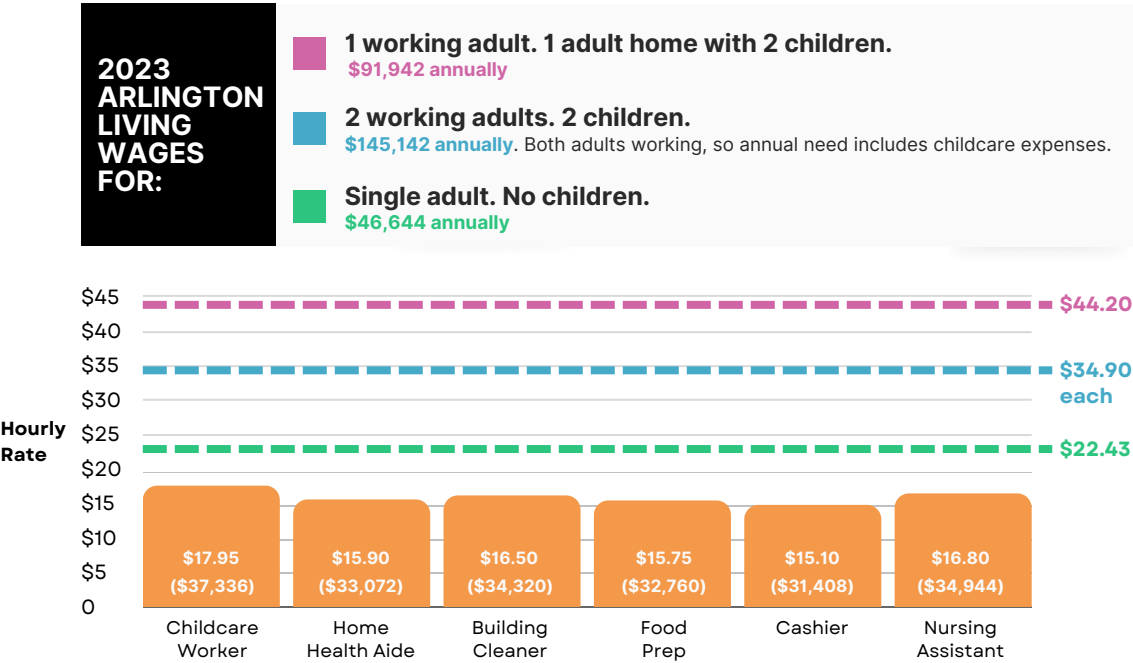
Arlington is an urban county with a population of 237,300 in the rapidly growing metropolitan Washington DC region. It has emerged as a regional hub for technology, education, and major corporations like Amazon, Boeing and Nestle. Overall, it is a very high income community: the 2023 area median income (AMI) for a family of four in Arlington County was \$152,100 per year. However, more than 10% of families live below 30% of that AMI threshold. **That is approximately 24,000 Arlington residents who struggle to meet their basic needs. These individuals are disproportionately people of color, and they often perform essential services for other county residents and businesses.**

Since 2016, Arlington Community Foundation (ACF) and the Arlington County Department of Human Services (DHS) have worked along with Arlington's safety net nonprofits to reduce bureaucratic hurdles across our community safety net to improve economic mobility among our most vulnerable residents. From 2018 until early 2023, ACF and DHS co-led a household-level pilot called 200 Bridges to test the improvements. This pilot provided holistic economic mobility supports to vulnerable households and revealed new ways to continuously improve the local safety net. It also motivated ACF and DHS to explore guaranteed income as an economic mobility strategy.

Arlington DHS is the anchor of the local safety net system and provides a uniquely integrated set of combined social services, housing assistance, employment services, behavioral health, and public health in a single organization. A hallmark of DHS is its commitment to respond holistically to communities affected by poverty, systemic racism, and fragmented care.

Arlington Community Foundation's top program priority is the affordability crisis and rapid displacement of Arlington's very low-income neighbors, particularly those making less than 30% of the 2023 area median income, or \$45,630 for a family of four. Residents living at this income level are child care providers, hospital aides, office cleaners, school bus drivers, construction workers and food service employees who **make significant contributions to Arlington's economic success despite not enjoying its full benefits.**

They face some of the highest child care costs in the country. Northern Virginia has the **highest rate of severe housing burden** in the nation among low-income households, defined as spending more than half of their income on housing. Current data show that **living expenses for households making 30% AMI in Arlington average three times what they make.**



[View sources, living wage definitions, and full job list [here](#)]

ACF and DHS’s efforts to address structural and systems issues are grounded in the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty’s three-fold criteria for moving out of poverty: increased income and assets, having personal power over one’s life, and a sense of connection and belonging to the community.

In 2020, ACF worked with Urban Institute and DHS to document the difficult trade-offs involved in surviving in this expensive community on a low income and the impact of punitive benefits policies as people try to earn their way to self-sufficiency. The result is a [brief video](#), updated in 2023, called “Earning More but Getting Poorer”. It highlights the dilemma facing low-wage earners: if they accept a higher-paying job that pays less than Arlington's extremely high living wage, they will lose thousands of dollars per year in critically needed subsidies for health care, food, child care, transportation or housing for their families.

The benefits cliff and other challenges faced by the thousands of households depending on the local safety net further fuel both ACF’s and DHS’s commitment to continue to explore strategies and policies to address persistent generational poverty in Arlington.



"WHEN I GOT IN THIS PROGRAM, I HAD THE CHANCE TO CHOOSE MY OWN PRINCIPLES. TO DO THAT, YOU NEED MONEY."

JOINING THE GUARANTEED INCOME MOVEMENT

ACF and DHS were inspired by the [Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration](#) and [Magnolia Mothers Trust](#) pilots and others demonstrating the power of regular unconditional cash with no strings attached to give struggling households extra breathing room. In September 2021, ACF and DHS launched the demonstration pilot [Arlington's Guarantee](#).

In the short term, Arlington's Guarantee is designed to build spending power for very low-income households who are increasingly being priced out of the community. In the longer term, Arlington's Guarantee is contributing our results and Arlington's voice to the national [Guaranteed Income Community of Practice](#), which consists of 144 other pilots, economists, legislators, and researchers seeking to address our broken economic systems that lead to exploitative low-wage work, paternalistic public benefits, and wealth inequality. The status quo that results in white households having nearly 10x the net worth of Black households is unacceptable.

Narrative change is a key element of the pilot. Some Arlington's Guarantee participants have generously [shared their stories](#) around what this cash with no strings attached has meant to their families. **Arlington's Guarantee seeks to upend distrust of people living in poverty by instead respecting and trusting their self-determination to use the unconditional cash to achieve their goals.** Another narrative the data challenges is that extra monthly cash discourages people from working. In fact, Arlington's data mirrors the overwhelming evidence from other GI pilots: this extra cushion of cash actually improves their ability to find new jobs and to gain certifications and education toward better jobs while protecting their needed benefits.

ACF has been invited to share their design and implementation insights with other pilots being launched across the country, just as ACF and DHS have learned from so many others in the work.

FUNDING

ACF raised the full budget from private donors, businesses, faith communities and other foundations. The budget was just over \$2 million, with \$1.8 million going directly into the participants' accounts (\$9,000 per household over 18 months). The remaining \$200,000 was a grant from the Kresge Foundation to cover the extra staff and operating costs for ACF to run the pilot. **No public dollars were used.**

Participants were enrolled in cohorts as ACF continually raised funds. Arlington's Guarantee ultimately enrolled eight cohorts of varying sizes (ranging from 15 to 44 participants), hitting the 200-household target over the course of 9 months from September 2021 to May 2022.

PROGRAM DESIGN

September 2021 - November 2023

\$500/mo. for 18 months

Fully enrolled with 200 households with children under 30% AMI, most currently on local housing grants

25 returning from incarceration;
25 undocumented

Privately funded

Protection from benefits loss

Optional 1:1 coaching

Surveys every 6 months, comparison group



Staffing and Partners

ACF and DHS co-designed the pilot and have worked closely throughout its implementation. ACF was the lead implementation partner, managing the day-to-day aspects of the cash disbursement, coach training, and data tracking. ACF employed the Program Advocate who was the key frontline position working with all participating households (over the course of the pilot, this position was filled by two different individuals). ACF also provided state policy outreach and represented Arlington's pilot in the guaranteed income community and with funders.

DHS staff pulled the random sample for both the cash recipients and the comparison group and had direct access to the full range of administrative data relevant to the cash recipients and comparison groups, and the benefits and resources they were connected to. A senior level DHS director led the evaluation of the pilot with assistance from her team. DHS also provided office space for the program advocate when in-person meetings with participants were needed.

DHS benefits eligibility staff played a critical role in ensuring that participant benefits were not reduced as a result of the extra income (see next section).

Urban Institute provided technical support for design and evaluation aspects of the pilot.

Finally, nine community-based coaches from DHS, Arlington Thrive, and OAR of Arlington, Alexandria, and Falls Church worked with the participants who opted for extra support in setting and working on goals for the extra cash. Britepaths, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Latino Economic Development Center also provided additional coaching supports as needed.



The ACF Arlington's Guarantee Team

Ensuring Benefits Protection as a Priority Before Launching the Pilot

A central design element of Arlington's Guarantee was ensuring that the extra income from the pilot would not result in the loss of essential public benefits for participants. This was accomplished via three specific strategies:

- **Private Funding.** Funding the pilot through private gifts rather than public sources meant that the cash could be considered a recurring private gift to participants, which would make it exempt when determining eligibility for tax purposes and for many public benefits.
- **Administrative guidance from state and local government.** ACF and DHS worked with officials at the state and local level to identify which benefits would not be affected by the cash. Protected benefits included: Medicaid, Head Start, Early Head Start, TANF, SNAP, child care subsidies, and locally funded Housing Grants. This protection was not a waiver of any existing regulations, but rather administrative clarification on how to code this recurring gift so it would not count towards benefits eligibility.
- **Data sharing to curate a randomization pool.** ACF's existing partnerships with DHS and nonprofit organizations made it possible to identify a pool of community members who did not receive the two public benefits that could not be protected: SSI and federally funded Housing Choice Vouchers. This data-sharing also enabled periodic verification that no one had lost benefits during recertification due to an eligibility worker misclassifying the cash as regular income. Participants consented that this shared data was used for pilot administration purposes.

Sampling and Demographics

ACF and DHS sought to create a sample representative of those living on very low incomes in Arlington and who gave us the opportunity to offer two-generation impacts. Our primary sample was community members who received a DHS Housing Grant, had at least one child under 18, and earned no more than 30% of the area median income. **The local Housing Grant pool provided an optimal sample because Arlington was able to protect these locally-funded housing benefits,** while federal Housing Choice Voucher benefits would not have been protected.

However, the Arlington's Guarantee partners were concerned about groups that may have been underrepresented in this sample, so they **created a carve-out for two specific populations: individuals re-entering the community after incarceration, and undocumented heads of households.**

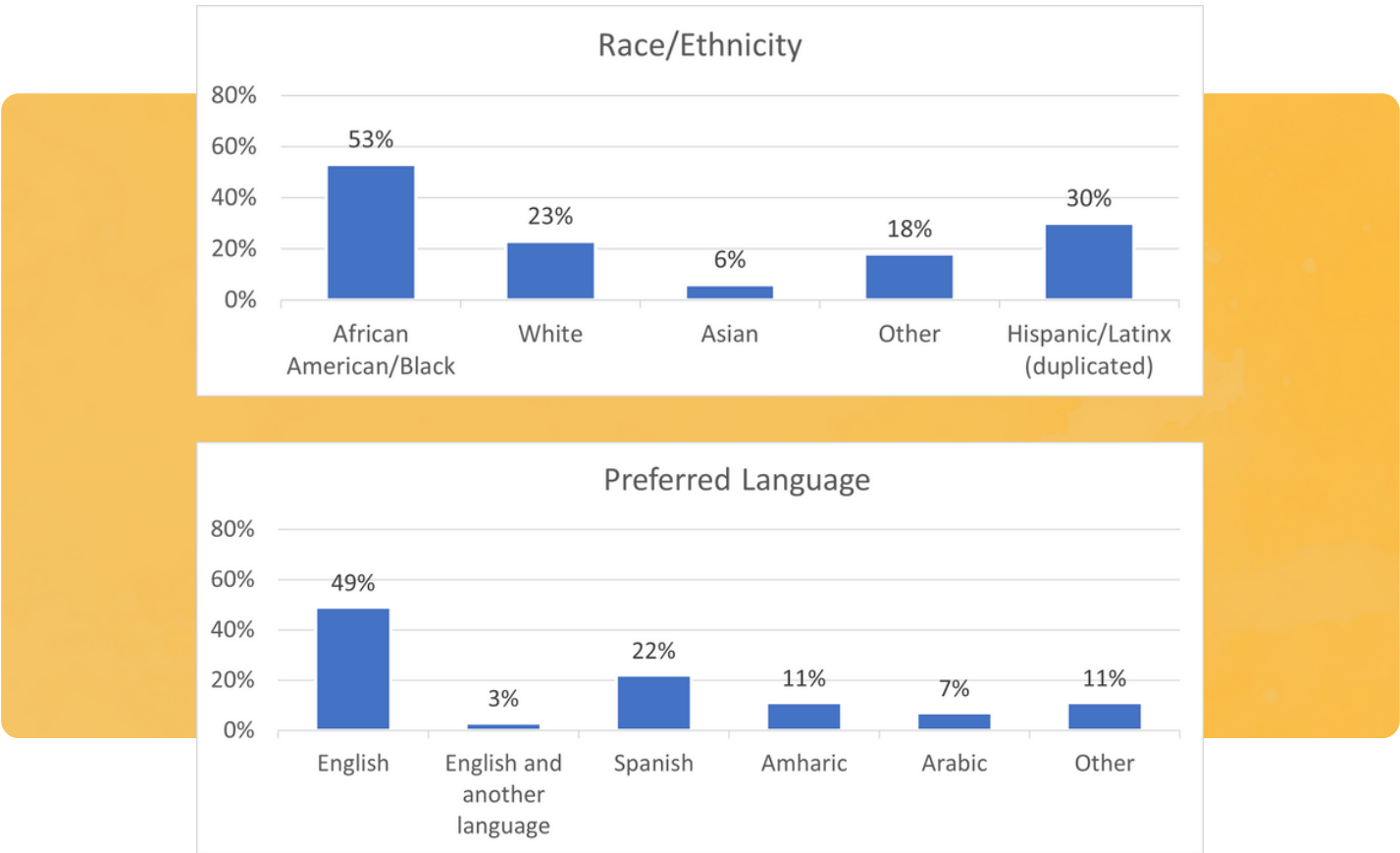
The sampling for the returning citizens was done in conjunction with OAR of Arlington, Alexandria, and Falls Church. The sampling for the undocumented heads of households was done in conjunction with service providers who were trusted contacts with this population. DHS randomized the pool of potential participants into a group of 200 that would receive the cash (the “participant group”) and a group of 100 that would not (the “comparison group”). Within the 200 in the participant group, 150 were housing grant recipients, 25 were returning citizens, and 25 were undocumented heads of households.

The comparison sample was similar in income level and demographics to the participant sample, including the proportion from the housing grant pool, and undocumented and returning citizens.

The most commonly selected racial identity was Black or African-American (53%), and the next most common was White (23%). Other races identified included Asian, American Indian, and Multi-Racial. For ethnicity, 30% identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and 70% identified as non-Hispanic.

English was preferred by 49% of respondents. Spanish was preferred by 22%, Amharic by 11%, and Arabic by 7%. Other languages identified include Bengali, Tigrinya, Mongolian, and Urdu.

Most respondents reported living in zip code 22204 (54%), 22206 (16%), or 22201 (10%).



Enrollment

The sampling procedure allowed ACF to inform potential participants via a letter that they had been selected to participate, rather than asking them to apply. The letter described that they would receive \$500 per month for 18 months, which public benefits would be protected, and that they would receive the cash via a Mastercard Usio debit card. ACF took several steps to demonstrate that this was a legitimate, trustworthy program – e.g., they collaborated with DHS to have the letter include a signature by the director of DHS as well as ACF’s CEO, and to include a recognizable county phone number that participants could use to call to verify and ask questions. Calls to this phone number were answered by the ACF Program Advocate. ACF hired experienced, bilingual professionals for this role who had both the administrative and human services skills to build trust and rapport with participants and serve as their ongoing primary point of contact.

Participants were asked in the letter to call for an initial phone screen and to give them the choice of participating. During this call, the Program Advocate would review program details and confirm which public benefits the participants received to ensure they could all be protected.

Participants were informed of surveys that would be requested throughout the pilot; they could opt-out of these surveys at any time and still receive the cash. Notably, only one of the 200 participants declined being surveyed. Participants then met with the Program Advocate in-person to 1) pick up and activate their debit card with their first month’s \$500, and 2) complete the baseline survey. All of these in-person meetings were held in a private office at the County’s DHS Customer Service Center. The Program Advocate had access to the DHS phone interpretation service.

“AS AN
UNDOCUMENTED
IMMIGRANT, I FEEL
LIKE A GHOST
SOMETIMES,
BECAUSE OFTEN,
WE HAVE TO STAY
HIDDEN.”

Luisa



Monthly Income Disbursement

All participants received a pre-paid debit Usio Mastercard. Participants only needed to provide a name – no other information or verification was required to receive the card. The Usio card also came with mobile app access, allowing participants to check their balance.

The Usio card includes an administrator portal that enabled ACF staff to view active cards and load funds monthly. Since participants could contact Usio customer service to report a lost card and get a new one re-issued, ACF would wait to load the card until we received confirmation that the participant had received the newly issued card.

Additional Supports

Participants were offered additional supports meant to help them maximize progress towards their goals during the 18-month pilot period. First, they were offered optional coaching services, i.e., the opportunity to meet 1-on-1 with a trained coach who would help them identify goals and take steps towards those goals. Overall, 1 in 3 participants engaged in coaching during the pilot.

ACF partnered with DHS staff and nonprofit providers who would serve as coaches. These coaches received training and met as a group at least quarterly to discuss observations and best practices. Coaching was oriented around setting actionable goals and creating accountability between the parties. The guiding question for coaching meant to spark ideas and action was “What might you be able to do now (with the monthly cash) that you could not do before?” This question was intentionally written to allow participants to identify both essential goals (defined as those focused on short-term, basic needs) or aspirational goals (those focused on longer term, more visionary desires).

“WE ASKED THE APARTMENT FOR RENTAL HELP, AND THEY DIDN'T EVICT US... THERE IS A LOT OF HELP IN THE COUNTY FOR FOOD AND OTHER THINGS. I AM ENROLLED IN THE FREE CLINIC.”



Coaches were asked to complete a monthly report for each coaching participant that asked them to identify what the participant goals are (either essential or aspirational), whether the participant created or updated a goal plan in the last 30 days, and the level of engagement from the participant (on a scale from 1-10).

In addition to optional coaching, cash participants often mentioned needs for services when talking with the Program Advocate. **The Program Advocate provided active listening and warm hand-offs to the DHS community assistance team and other community resources.**

In addition to optional coaching, cash participants often mentioned needs for services when talking with the Program Advocate. The Program Advocate provided active listening and warm hand-offs to the DHS community assistance team and other community resources. **This included at least 678 documented referrals for assistance with food, employment, and much more.**

To conclude the pilot, the Program Advocate completed a detailed off-boarding call with each participant before their second-to-last payment. He offered reminders of the payment timeline throughout the pilot, so this served as a final reminder and as an opportunity to discuss any questions and any final hand-offs to services if requested by the participants. Participants were sent a letter summarizing the benefits protection offered through the pilot to use during future encounters with eligibility staff.

Implementation Insights from Project Leaders

Enrolling participants in cohorts rather than all at once was beneficial. It allowed for face-to-face onboarding, orientation to their benefits protection and debit card set up as each participant was enrolled. This was much more manageable than trying to handle an influx of 200 participants speaking 13 languages all at once. It also made the 6-month survey load and approving the monthly card loads by Usio Mastercard more manageable.

Some pilots hold an open application process resulting in exponentially more people applying than can be included. **ACF and DHS consciously chose not to create an open application process** because they had a large sample pool that already met the very low-income two-generation households criteria. Using a sample pool also meant that DHS already had accurate administrative data on exactly which benefits each received prior to enrollment. This allowed DHS to carefully track and ensure that no benefits were lost due to the guaranteed monthly income. We also avoided having hundreds, if not thousands, of applicants go through the hoops to apply only to be rejected.

Evaluation Data Collection

ACF and DHS created a survey with input from Urban Institute to administer to both cash and comparison groups at baseline and at 6-month intervals, for a total of 4 surveys per person over the 18-month pilot. Survey questions were based on validated assessment instruments and assessed food security, employment, educational activities, income, savings, debt, physical health and well-being, stress, family and social connections, and feelings of personal autonomy. ACF and DHS added several direct questions with open-ended responses to the final survey. These were aimed at understanding if and how the extra cash affected participants' use of time, taking advantage of opportunities in the community, sense of control over the future, and sense of belonging. Since these final questions referred to the impacts of the extra cash, they were not given to the comparison group. These additional four questions yielded very rich qualitative data (see "Findings" section).

Surveys generally took 20-40 minutes to complete, although in some instances they could take longer, particularly when language interpretation other than Spanish was needed.

For the cash group, the Program Advocate conducted the baseline survey in-person and follow-up surveys over the phone. The surveys were done in a conversational manner to increase the response rate and the depth of responses. Cash group participants were compensated with a \$20 gift card to Target or Safeway after each survey.

Arlington Thrive, OAR and Arlington Free Clinic assisted with the comparison group surveys, which were conducted by phone. Comparison group members followed the same survey schedule and methodology and were compensated with a \$30 gift card for their time. This was increased to \$40 to incentivize completion as time went on.



"I'VE BEEN A
RESIDENT OF
ARLINGTON ALL
MY LIFE, AND
WHEN I WAS AT
MY WORST POINT,
ARLINGTON WAS
THERE TO HELP
ME."

Clay [Read more about Clay [here](#)]

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation analysis was led by Michael-dharma Irwin, Arlington DHS Quality and Administration Division Director and an experienced evaluator. ACF's choice to not contract for a full randomized control trial (RCT) allowed more flexibility in how they related to the participants.

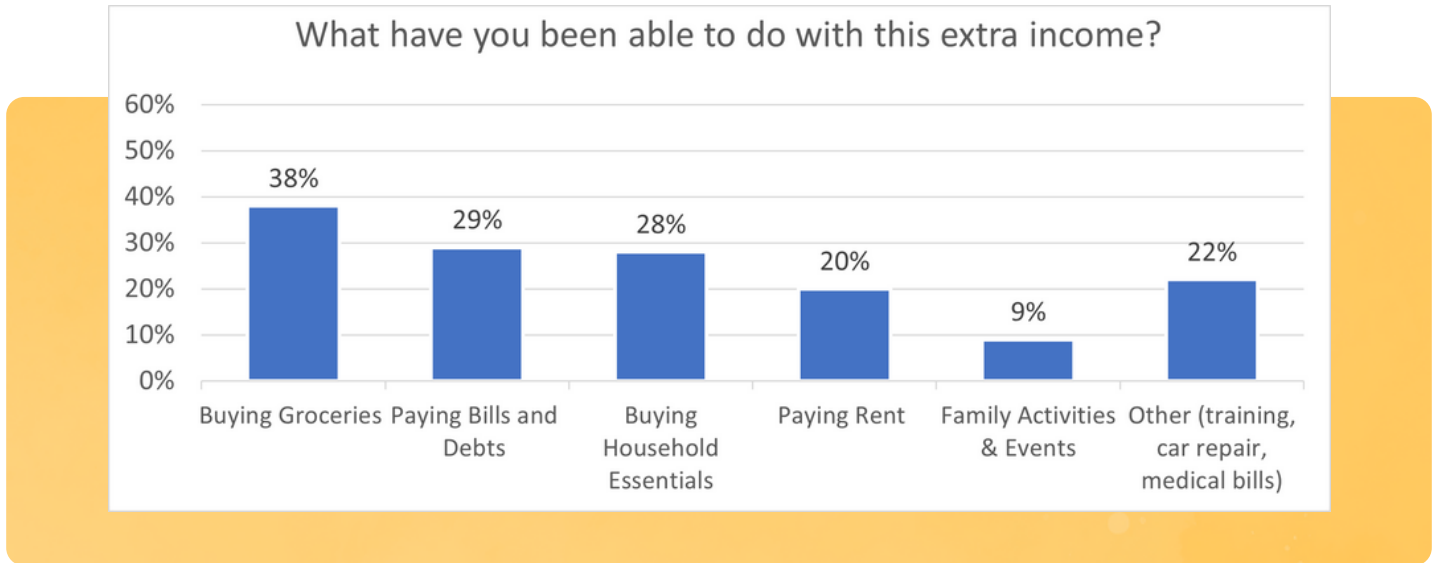
For example, the ACF Program Advocates who conducted the 6-month surveys had an understanding of the local safety net. Once a survey was complete, they were able to extend warm handoff referrals to community resources based on needs participants raised during these encounters. It also allowed ACF to channel the funds raised directly to the participants rather than paying for an expensive RCT.

The inclusion of a randomly selected comparison group drawn from the same pool enabled us to compare outcomes for participants to outcomes for similar households who did not receive the cash.

Reflecting the Power of Freedom of Choice

A fundamental tenet of guaranteed income is preserving the freedom of choice and dignity of individuals. People know best how to spend their money at any point in time. To gain insight into what individual needs participants chose to address, we asked participants at each survey interval:

“Within the past 6 months, what have you been able to do with the extra income from the Arlington’s Guarantee program that you would not have been able to do without it?”



Most commonly, participants remarked that they were able to buy more or better-quality food to feed their families, including food items not covered by food stamps.

Many individuals cited bills and debts they were able to pay. “Because when I had surgery, and I wasn't working I was able to pay the bills and for food.” For those who had gotten into debt, the money enabled them to cover expenses without increasing their debt. “During the pandemic I borrowed money, but now with this money, I don't have to borrow. The rent amount is increasing, the car payments and repairs. Things are getting tight at this point. With \$500 I can take care of the gas, the electrical, and the car.”

The next most common “things they could do now” mentioned were meeting family and household needs--new shoes for the children, a warm coat in the winter, bedding for the new baby. “This money has changed my kids' lives. Each kids have their own beds and mattresses.” Additionally, families were able to keep up with rising rent costs and maintain their homes in Arlington. “I pay most of my rent with that money because I hurt myself on the job and they fired me. If it wasn't for Arlington Guarantee, my bills wouldn't have been taken care of.”

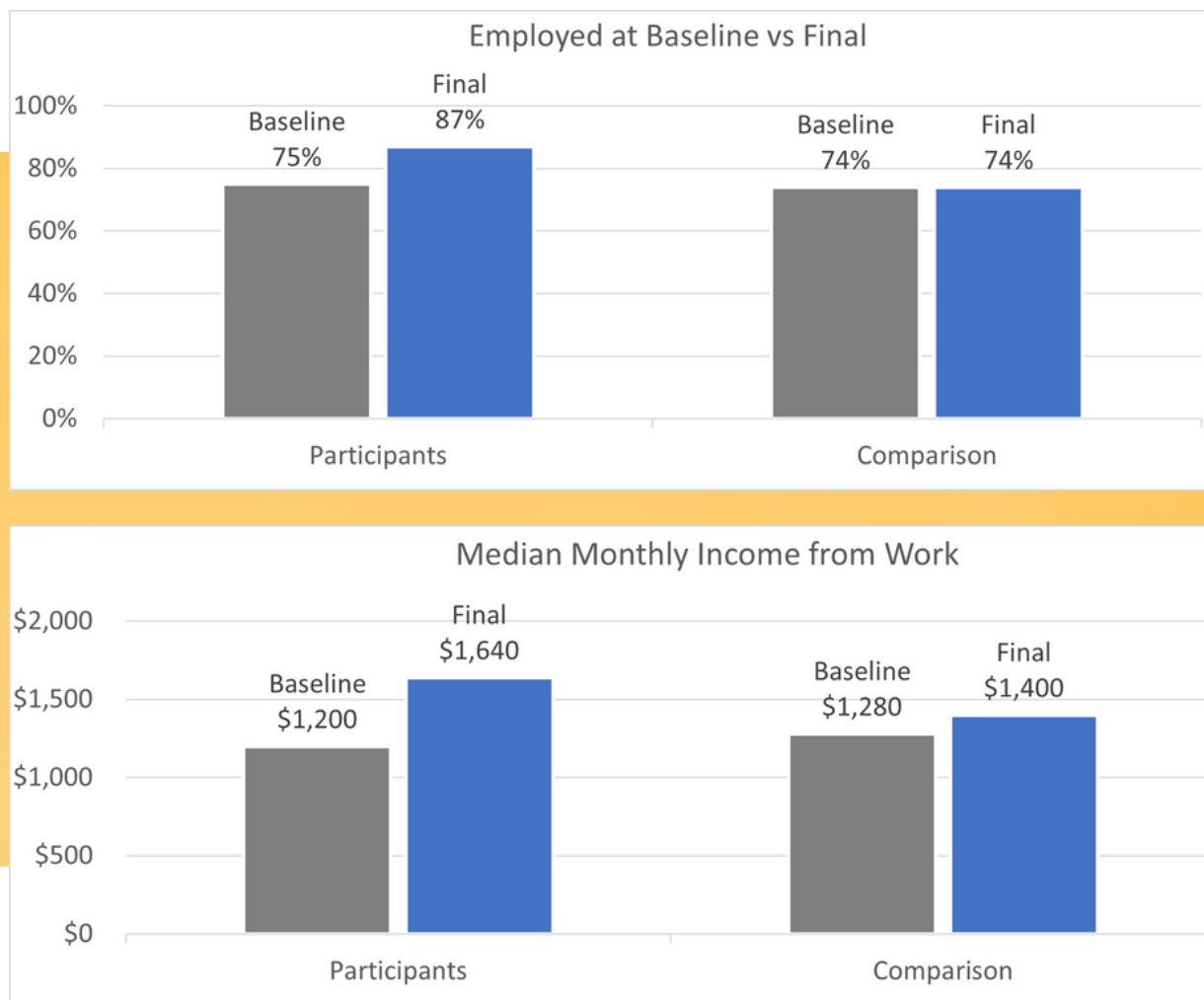
Many participants described being able to enjoy activities with their families beyond meeting basic needs. One individual noted, “I can take the kids to little fairs and stuff. You know where you go to a fair and buy a ticket for \$25, and they buy food and get their faces painted.” Another commented “I was able to start something I was wanting to do for a while, like painting with my daughter. We buy canvases and we paint together.” Another shared, “Saving some for my kids, getting them what they need, we went to Atlanta to visit family. I couldn't do that without it.” Seven individuals specifically cited being able to buy Christmas presents due to the funds (a generous donor provided an unsolicited holiday surprise by underwriting a bonus \$500 deposit in every participant’s debit card just after Thanksgiving).

In addition to the categories above, participants described dozens of things they could not pay for before but could now. Some were able to put their children in daycare. Others were able to pursue educational opportunities, like GED study courses, phlebotomy classes, or CDL licensure. Many ended up paying for necessary medical care which had often been delayed for years. At least 10 cars were repaired and fueled so individuals could drive them to work. A few individuals were even able to create an emergency fund, so that they would be better prepared for the next time a financial crisis hit their family. **Individuals were able to direct money to deal with the issues they saw as most important, giving each person greater financial stability and increasing their quality of life.**

“There is no qualifications for how I use the money. Some benefits try to put me in a bracket like to have more kids or lower income which doesn't help me grow, but this program makes me feel like I wasn't being put in a box.”

Increased Employment and Income

At baseline, 75% of participants and 74% of comparison families reported that they were employed. **By the final survey, the percentage of participants who were employed had increased significantly to 87%** (statistically significant 95% confidence), while the percentage of comparison households did not change (74% BL, 75% final).



In addition to increased employment, participants reported an increase in both income from work and total income (excluding payments from Arlington’s Guarantee). Median monthly income from work for all participants increased 36% (\$1,200 BL, \$1,640 final), while work income for the comparison group increased 9% (\$1,280 BL, \$1,400 final). When looking only at respondents who reported being employed, median income from work continued to show a larger increase for participants (\$1,573 BL, \$1,900 final, 20% increase) than for comparison households (\$1,600 BL, \$1,800 final, 12.5% increase). The hourly wage earned by participants increased 10% (\$15 BL, \$16.50 final), while the hourly wage in the comparison group did not increase (\$16.00 BL, \$15.75 final).

In addition to higher income from work, participants reported an increase in total income. Median monthly total income (including sources such as Social Security, child support, and benefits; excluding payments from Arlington’s Guarantee) increased 84% for participants (\$1,298 BL, \$2,400 final), while increasing 40% for the comparison group (\$1,280 BL, \$1,800 final). In addition to the higher percentage of participants who obtained employment during the program, the increase in total income for participants may be related to the support that participants received from the program advocate and their coaches in connecting to public benefits and other assistance for which they were eligible.

At baseline, some participants reported working 6-7 days per week and up to 16 hours per day, using gig work such as rideshare and delivery driving to cover living expenses. In the final survey, when participants were asked if the program allowed them to use their time differently, 85% of participants agreed or strongly agreed.

Rather than working overtime or multiple jobs to meet basic needs, some participants reported using the time to pursue credentials (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant, CDL) that could lead to a higher-paying job or starting their own business. Other participants indicated that Arlington's Guarantee helped them pursue better-paying jobs by allowing them to purchase interview clothes or cover the gap between their old and new jobs.

"Because of this help I started training for my pharmacy degree."

"By getting this money, I was able to use my time to study for my new business instead of driving Uber."

"I was able to buy things for myself so I can be presentable for interviews."

"I knew that I had a pocket of income to cover the time between my jobs."

"With the additional money I was able to go to school. I didn't have the pressure to work more. I had flexibility in my budget with more than one stream of income which opens up more options to tap into."

Increased Ability to Meet Basic Needs

Arlington's Guarantee participants experienced significant improvement in their ability to meet basic needs like food security and transportation.

- The percentage of participants who reported that in the past 12 months they had worried about running out of food before they got the money to buy more improved from 61% at baseline to 42% at final (99% confidence), while the comparison group experienced a smaller improvement (63% BL, 50% final, 95% confidence).
- The percentage of participants who reported having no trouble paying for a ride or any form of transportation improved from 68% at baseline to 86% at final (99% confidence), while the comparison group showed no improvement (76% BL, 70% final, not statistically significant).

In their open-ended responses, some participants highlighted the effect of the program in helping them to afford basic needs, particularly when faced with unexpected situations such as illness or loss of employment.

"My two children only had one book bag, but I was able to buy them another one with the money."

"I was able to buy my son shoes. His feet are growing so fast and it's hard to keep up."

"Usually you don't know when you will have a money shortage. That \$500 helps to pay emergency stuff. I can pay some gas or other things."

"Before, if we needed something, we didn't have the money to buy it. Gas was very expensive so we didn't go many places. Now we can."

Housing and Financial Stability

Outcomes in housing among Arlington's Guarantee participants were less encouraging; and financial stability outcomes were mixed. External economic factors and extreme housing affordability pressures in Arlington likely contribute to the findings in these areas. In presenting to the Guaranteed Income Community of Practice in December 2023, Dr. Amy Castro of the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at the University of PA noted that results from other GI pilots concluding over the past year reflect the destabilizing effects of high inflation and post pandemic lifting of the eviction moratoriums. This is borne out in Arlington's Guarantee data. **Despite many positive outcomes, Arlington's Guarantee participants had an aggregate increased debt and continued to be severely rent-burdened.**

Insurmountable Housing Affordability Pressures

Housing costs in Arlington are among the highest in the nation according to the [Economic Research Institute](#). To increase affordability for low-income households, Arlington County funds the Housing Grants program, which subsidizes rent for low-income working families, people with disabilities, and older adults. Households in the program pay approximately 40% of their income toward rent. To qualify for Housing Grant assistance, families must meet minimum requirements for hours worked and income. During the pandemic, these requirements were temporarily relaxed due to the impact that COVID had on low-income workers. These guidelines were reinstated in July 2022.

Approximately 78% of households in Arlington's Guarantee participated in the Housing Grants program. Even so, housing was a significant expense for both participant and comparison households. The average monthly Housing Grant subsidy was \$711 in 2023. It is calculated based on household income and either their apartment's actual rent or the Maximum Allowable Rent (MAR) set by Arlington County (whichever is less).

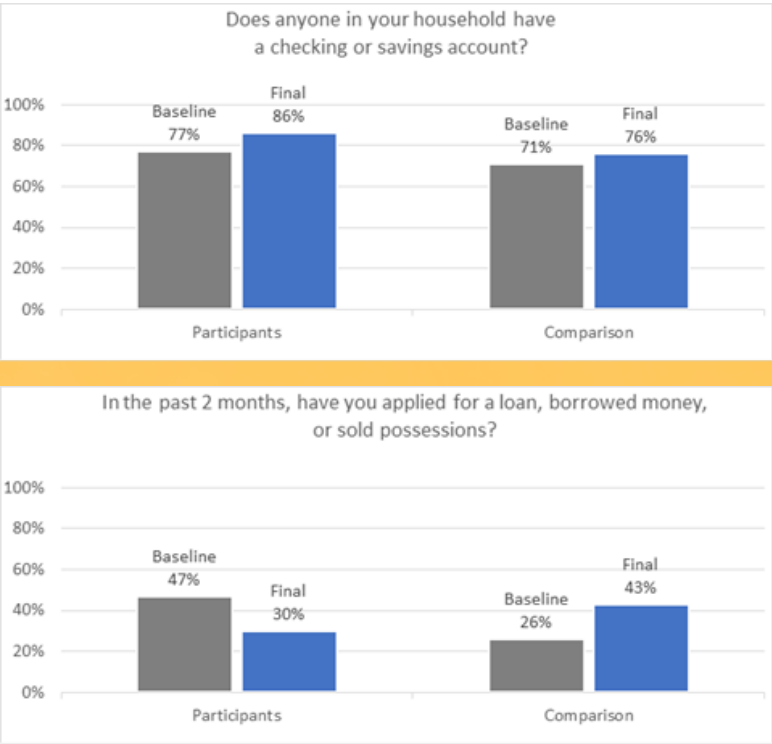
If a household’s rent exceeds the MAR, their subsidy does not increase, and they are responsible for the additional cost. The 2023 MAR ranged from \$1,452 to \$2,013 per month, based on household size. However, it is often challenging for households to find housing in Arlington at or under the MAR.

Respondents were asked on each survey to report approximately how much they spent per month on rent and utilities, as their share of the rent beyond any Housing Grant or other subsidies. Response options ranged from less than \$900 per month to \$1,300 or more per month. By the final survey, 92% of participants and 75% of comparison households reported paying \$1,300 or more per month in rent and utilities beyond what their Housing Grant covered.

Mixed Results in Financial Stability

Arlington’s Guarantee participants showed significant improvement in several measures related to long-term financial stability:

- The percentage of participants who had bank accounts increased from 77% at baseline to 86% at final (95% confidence), while the comparison group showed no statistically significant change (71% BL, 76% final).
- On each survey, respondents were asked whether they had used any of the following unsustainable methods to meet their financial needs in the past two months: applying for bank loans, applying for payday loans, pawning or selling possessions, or borrowing money from friends or family. The percentage of participants who reported using any of these financial strategies decreased from 47% at baseline to 30% at final (99% confidence), while the comparison group worsened (26% BL, 43% final, 99% confidence).



In their open-ended responses, many participants indicated that Arlington's Guarantee had allowed them to pay down debt, pay bills on time, build their credit, and begin saving toward an emergency reserve or long-term goals for themselves or their children.

"Before this program I have almost \$30,000 debt and now it comes to \$22,000, so it's helped a me a lot."

"I was able to get rid of my debt and build better credit for the future and any future endeavors like buying a house or buying a car."

In the final surveys, 94% of participants who had stated an explicit goal to pay down debt were able to make progress; and 67% of those whose goal was to save were able to make progress toward saving money.

However, *in aggregate*, participant households' debt increased. Over the course of the program, average and median household debt increased in both the participant and comparison groups. **The majority of participant (96% BL, 95% final) and comparison (88% BL, 84% final) households reported that they would still be unable to pay an unexpected \$400 expense using their savings, and would need to apply for a loan, borrow money, or sell possessions to cover the emergency.**

Increased Belonging in the Community

Most Arlington's Guarantee participants felt more valued in their community at the end of the program. In the final survey, **81% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program had made them feel more included in the community.**

Participants reported that being able to reduce overtime or weekend work or get jobs with better schedules gave them more time to participate in community activities. They reported being able to connect with others because they felt less exhausted and less stressed about meeting basic needs. They were able to buy a birthday present for their child to attend a birthday party.

Connections they formed included participating in activities in their apartment complex, meeting other parents informally or through support groups, helping their children participate in sports teams, and informally supporting neighbors.

"It's made me feel that I exist in the community."

"Normally, I am a foreigner, but the community is looking at me as just one of the citizens and letting me be part of the program."

"This program allows me to live without feeling inferior, dressing nicely, and living with the community in good condition."

"I could stop and really talk to my neighbors and even help them with telling them about different programs that Arlington has that I learned from you and other people."

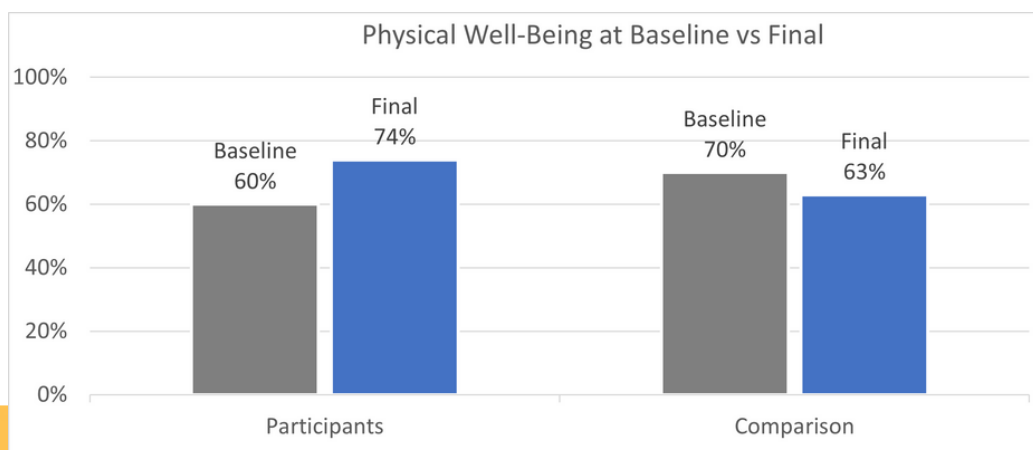
"I was included because there are things you need to do to go out. I was able to contribute some dish from my house for events. I wasn't isolated because I don't have income."

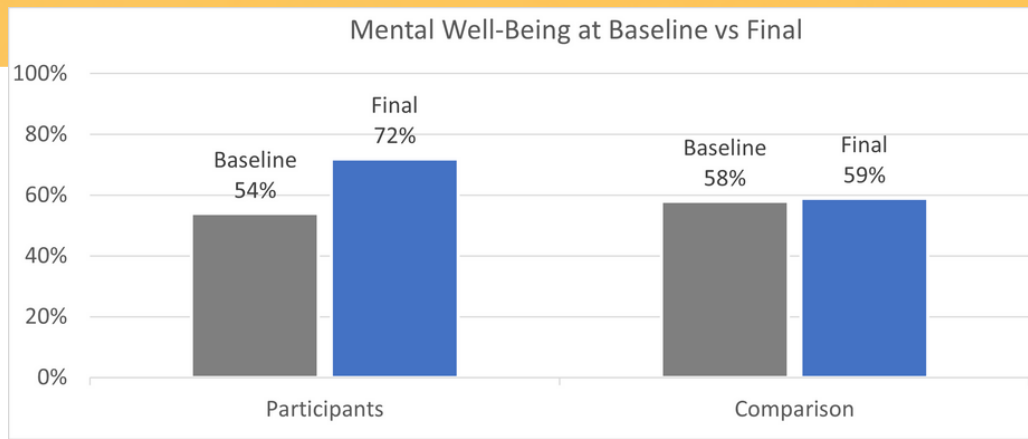
"There's this elderly gentleman upstairs in a wheelchair who got out of rehab. If I'm off work, I would go up and help him. If I'm out, I can buy him something from the store, and I use this money."

Improved Mental and Physical Wellbeing

Arlington's Guarantee participants significantly improved their mental and physical wellbeing. When asked how many days in the past month poor physical health had prevented them from doing their usual activities, the percentage of participants reporting zero days improved from 60% at baseline to 74% at final (99% confidence), while the percentage reporting zero days in the comparison group declined (70% BL, 63% final, 90% confidence).

When asked how many days in the past month stress, anxiety, or sadness had prevented them from doing their usual activities, the percentage of participants reporting zero days improved from 54% at baseline to 72% at final (99% confidence), while the percentage for the comparison group remained unchanged (58% BL, 59% final).





In the final survey, participants were asked if the program allowed them to feel more in control of their future. **84% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program had increased their sense of control.** In their open-ended responses to this question, many participants highlighted that Arlington’s Guarantee had reduced the stress and anxiety they felt about meeting the expenses of daily living, managing emergency expenses, and providing opportunities for their children. They reported less exhaustion, and more hope for the future. Some also indicated that the program had enabled them to take time off to receive healthcare or recover from injuries.

“It’s a mental thing for me. Just the fact that I knew that I had an income coming, it helped me not have panic attacks. I knew I could have food for the kids and pay the bills. It allowed me to use my time to be wise about money and not stressed about money.”

“This program has allowed me to work more and make more because I feel much more at ease, and it has given me the strength to handle things.”

“I just felt more a part of life. More like a role player.”

“Because I was able to open my eyes to even think about things that I wanted to do. I was able to think about the future like getting a food truck and paying for a class.”

“In my case, I have a daughter with asthma, and I have more time to take her to the doctor.”

“This money gives me relief so I can plan. If I can work and get more, I can make a better life. As a single mom, it’s not easy, but it gives me energy to go to school, and I can see the future.”

“I spent more time putting plans into motion as opposed to stressing over financial obstacles. I found myself more confident to transition from survival mode and simply existing to making plans.”

"MY DAUGHTER HAS
JOINED A TEAM,
SO I BECAME
A DANCE MOM!"



Increased Parental Involvement

Many Arlington's Guarantee participants reported spending more time on family activities. When asked how often they got involved with their children's education (e.g., reading, helping with homework, meeting with teachers, etc.) in the past month, the percentage of participants reporting never or less than once a week improved from 14% at baseline to 5% at final (99% confidence), while the percentage in the comparison group worsened (5% BL, 13% final, 95% confidence).

In addition, in the final survey, 91% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program had allowed them to take advantage of new opportunities for themselves and their family.

In their open-ended responses, most participants highlighted increased time with family as a result of Arlington's Guarantee. With Arlington's Guarantee, many participants shared that they were able to reduce the amount of overtime worked and spend quality time with their children and enroll them in new activities.

"I used to work 16 hours and pick up any long hour, and while I was doing that, I was missing out on time with my kids; and even doing that, I wasn't able to cover all the expenses, and now I can cover all my bills and spend time with my family."

"Before, I had to find extra work at night, and I couldn't see my children."

"Now, I'm not worried if I can't work on the weekend and still take my sons to their activities. It gave me relief."

"I could be more focused on my daughter to help her apply to college."

Benefits Protection and Retention

ACF was committed to not jeopardizing participants' benefits as a result of the extra \$500 in monthly unconditional cash.

Upon pilot completion, Arlington DHS benefits program staff completed a case review of all participants' Housing Grants, Medicaid, SNAP, Child Care Subsidies and confirmed that no households lost benefits due to the additional income from Arlington's Guarantee. It is a testament to the care and attention of all DHS and ACF staff involved that we were able to honor this commitment.

Nevertheless, over the course of the program, events occurred that affected benefits retention for both participants and comparison households for other reasons. These changes included:

- Suspension of state benefit renewal requirements and closures during the pandemic, and reinstatement in May 2023
- Suspension of Housing Grants work requirements during the pandemic, and reinstatement in July 2022

A total of 58 participant households lost one or more of these benefits for other reasons besides receipt of the monthly \$500 from the pilot. Among the 58 participants who lost benefits, the most common reasons were failure to submit renewal paperwork (32%); not meeting minimum work hours (21%)--anecdotally, some households reported that they could not afford child care and thus limited their work hours; and excess income from work (18%)--the notorious benefits cliff. Other reasons included moving out of the County (14%)--likely related to high housing costs; and loss of eligibility for family-related benefits when the youngest child turned 18 (11%).

Even with these losses, participants retained these critically needed benefits at a significantly higher rate than the comparison group. The Program Advocate and coaches frequently worked with participants to help troubleshoot challenges with benefits applications, as well as to speak directly with benefits program staff to help resolve questions.

Among households who had coverage at the beginning of the program, 58% of participants retained Housing Grants compared to 42% in the comparison group. 96% of participants retained Medicaid coverage compared to 84% in the comparison group. And 72% of participants retained SNAP benefits, compared to 58% in the comparison group. One participant lost their child care subsidy due to not submitting renewal paperwork.

Long-Term Goals Analysis

On their final survey, participants and comparison group households were asked if they had any long-term goals for their family over the past 18 months, and if so, if they made any progress. Arlington's Guarantee participants were significantly more likely than comparison group households to have set long-term goals (84% participants, 53% comparison, 99% confidence), but both groups were equally likely to have made progress toward their chosen goals (70% participants, 67% comparison).

"I wasn't as worried about where I was going to get the money for groceries and things like that. It helps me to work on things that are not tangible because I was able to maintain my plans or whatever I had to do. It supported me to stay on track."

More participant than comparison group goals focused on employment or career development (31% participant goals, 12% comparison goals). Among comparison households, goals related to housing were most common (14% participant goals, 21% comparison goals).

The most common goals among participants included:

- Career development (28% of goals) – such as getting a professional license, completing a degree, taking classes, starting a new career, or starting a business. More than half (55%) of participants who had goals in this area made at least some progress – e.g., starting a training or degree program – although most were not able to fully complete them as the goals were long-term.
- Financial goals (21% of goals) – such as increasing savings, paying down debt, or saving toward a specific goal such as a car. Almost all participants whose goal was to pay down debt were able to make progress (94%), and most were able to make progress toward saving money (67%).
- Family-related goals (20% of goals) – such as getting children involved in activities, helping children apply to or save for college, meeting family basic or medical needs, and visiting or supporting other family members outside the household. More than half of participants with family-related goals were able to fully complete them (53%).
- Housing-related goals (14% of goals) – such as stabilizing housing, moving into a larger apartment, or buying a house. While no participants reported buying a house, most who had housing-related goals were able to make progress (58%) such as increasing their credit score, saving money, or relocating to a larger apartment.
- Employment-related goals (11% of goals) – such as finding employment, finding full-time employment, or finding a better-paying job. Of participants with employment-related goals, 57% were able to make progress, with some reporting that they found better-paying jobs.

Some participants reported achieving the goals they had set and feeling hopeful about the future.

"I got a better job than my previous job. I am spending more time with my kids, and they are more comfortable with the schedule. With this job, I am very hopeful that I can start some schooling to start a better job in the future."

"I saved some money. I took some courses. Next, I'm going to take a CNA course and finish my school and go to nursing school."

"I lost 50 pounds, I got a promotion, and I feel much better about things."

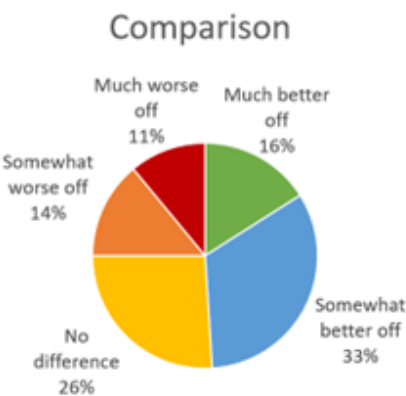
"I was able to get my CDA as I had planned to."

Others achieved some goals, but resource limitations or unexpected expenses or medical issues prevented them from achieving all of their goals. Those who did not make progress often identified health issues or job changes as barriers.

Overall Impact Over the Past 18 Months

On their final survey, participants and comparison group members were asked to think about their experience over the past 18 months and identify how they and their family were doing now compared to 18 months ago. 98% of participants indicated that they were much better off or somewhat better off, while less than half of comparison households (49%) reported that they were better off than they were 18 months ago (99% confidence):

How are you and your family doing now compared to 18 months ago?



Additional Analysis

Sample Subgroups: Undocumented and Returning Participants Had Less Positive Outcomes

As described in “Sampling” above, Arlington’s Guarantee included three groups of households. The vast majority participated in the Housing Grant program for working families, and there were also carve-outs for undocumented immigrant heads of households, and residents returning from incarceration. Because families enrolled in the Housing Grant program represented the majority of households in Arlington’s Guarantee, their results were generally consistent with the results reported above for the program overall. Results for the carve-out groups were more likely to differ and were generally less positive than results for the Housing Grant sample. At the time of the final survey, the largest differences between the subgroups occurred in Employment and Income, and Financial Stability and Basic Needs.

Employment and Income: On the final survey, participants from the Housing Grants sample reported the highest rates of employment, highest median total monthly income, and highest hourly wages. Trends for the two carve-out groups were as follows:


- Participants who were undocumented had lower rates of employment, lower hourly wages, and much lower total monthly income. This is tied to the fact that people without documentation are ineligible for many employment opportunities.
- Participants who were returning from incarceration reported hourly wages similar to those of participants who received Housing Grants; however, they were much less likely to report being employed. This trend likely relates to the barriers that legal system involvement presents to obtaining employment. Those who reported being employed had a median total monthly income of \$1,990; however, because many returning residents did not have employment, the median total monthly income for the group as a whole was the lowest of all the groups.

Final Survey Question (percent yes)	Housing Grant	Undocumented	Returning from Incarceration
Were you employed last week? (87% overall)	92%	79%	64%
Median total monthly income (\$2,400 overall)	\$2,588	\$1,534	\$1,471
Median hourly wage (\$16.50 overall)	\$16.88	\$15.00	\$16.73

Financial Stability and Basic Needs: On the final survey, participants from the Housing Grants sample reported the highest levels of financial stability: they were the most likely to have a bank account and the least likely to take out loans or use other unsustainable financial practices. They also reported the least difficulty in meeting basic needs: they were the least likely to experience food insecurity, the most likely to have access to medical care, and the least likely to worry about housing instability. Trends for the two carve-out groups were as follows:

- **Participants who were undocumented experienced the highest level of difficulty in meeting basic needs.** They were much less likely than participants overall to have bank accounts or access to medical care and were much more likely than participants overall to experience food insecurity and to worry about housing instability. People without documentation may be unable to open bank accounts and are ineligible for benefits that help other low-income households to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and medical care.
- Participants who were returning from incarceration also reported high levels of difficulty in meeting most basic needs. In most areas, this group experienced slightly higher levels of stability than undocumented participants, but significantly lower levels of stability than participants overall. In addition, **returning residents were much more likely than other participants to take out loans or use other unsustainable financial practices.** This trend may be related to the higher levels of unemployment discussed above, as well as the barriers that legal system involvement presents to obtaining housing.

Final Survey Question (percent yes)	Housing Grant	Undocumented	Returning from Incarceration
Have a bank account (86% overall)	90%	58%	76%
Took out loans or other unsustainable financial practices (30% overall)	26%	26%	64%
Worried about running out of money to buy food (42% overall)	37%	68%	55%
Relied on a few kinds of low-cost foods due to running out of money (43% overall)	33%	84%	68%
Spending \$1300 or more per month on rent and utilities (92% overall)	97%	89%	64%
Worried about not having stable housing in next 2 months (42% overall)	34%	84%	59%
All family members have access to medical care (88% overall)	88%	74%	100%



"MY COACH HELPED
MY WIFE MAKE
DECISIONS ABOUT
HER EDUCATION.
SHE IS IN A NURSING
PROGRAM NOW."

Coaching Outcomes

All Arlington's Guarantee participants were offered the opportunity to participate in coaching, as described in the "Additional Supports" section above.

Of the 200 participants, 34% (67 of 200) participated in at least one coaching session. Each month, coaches reported how engaged their participants were on a scale of 1 to 10. The majority of participants (94%, 63 of 67) were rated as highly engaged (22 of 67, avg rating 7-10) or moderately engaged (41 of 67, avg rating 4-7). Moderately and highly engaged participants remained engaged in coaching for an average of 6 months, while participants with low engagement levels discontinued coaching after an average of 2.5 months.

Participants who participated in coaching were more likely to set long-term goals for their family than those who did not participate in coaching (92% with coaching, 79% without coaching, 99% confidence). However, participants in coaching experienced outcomes similar to those of participants overall in all of the areas above – including employment, income, financial stability, housing, belonging in the community, and mental and physical well-being. This suggests that unrestricted and recurring cash had an outsized impact compared to one-on-one supports from their coaches.

Most participants reported positive experiences with their coaches. Positive feedback highlighted several aspects of the coach's role:

Coaches helped participants locate and connect with resources such as classes, employment postings, or tools to start their own business:

“In the beginning [my coach] sent me many very useful links to establish my business and resources with the community.”

“[My coach] helped me a lot with suggestions to sign up for Padres Comprometidos and for me to take GED classes. My husband and I are going to the Padres Comprometidos, and I will start classes in May.”

Coaches also helped participants to apply for benefits and assistance programs, and work with creditors to reduce their debt:

“I worked with [my coach] to help to find affordable rent, food stamps, especially during the pandemic. Anything we asked, she gave us the information.”

“I just started to work and couldn't qualify for rental assistance. [My coach] helped connect me to help. This year, I have a housing grant. With your program's help, I have a car, and I'm in a better place now. My kid is in daycare.”

“One thing I really want to mention is when I started with the program, I had a debt that I owed to the apartment, and [my coach] was able to help me with that.”

Some participants highlighted developing a budget and savings plan as an area in which the coach's support or the classes the coach connected them with as being particularly helpful:

“I worked with [my coach], and she helped me save money each paycheck. I could reach my goals of finding a job and saving money.”

Other participants highlighted the coach's support in helping them to make plans and maintain motivation to pursue long-term goals:

“I made progress on my goals with [my coach], and I was able to accomplish them. It definitely gave me a push to get things done. It was nice to have goals to look forward to.”

“I think I made progress, at least I attempted it and made a plan. But things came up. But having a game plan is at least a good start. Something that you can pick up again later when you are able.”

Among participants who did not report benefitting from coaching, the most common barrier cited was lack of time due to work schedules, family responsibilities, or other life stressors.

ACKNOWLEDGING BOTH LIMITS AND ENDURING EFFECTS OF A TEMPORARY PILOT

Given the time-limited nature of this pilot, we fully acknowledge that some of the positive outcomes from this infusion of extra income will dissipate, and many participants will continue to struggle. The ACF team has had hundreds of conversations with participants as their time in the pilot wound down and in the recent months afterward. In these conversations, we have learned, not surprisingly, that many of their stresses around meeting basic needs and rent have returned, and some of the opportunities they were able to enjoy with their children have been reduced.

Anticipating that this would be the case was an important motivator for ACF and DHS to set up the robust system of warm handoffs to resources not only during the pilot, but as it concluded as well. Before enrollment, the participants were already involved in the local safety net offered through DHS and the community nonprofits, and they will continue to be. DHS, ACF and the nonprofits affirm that the participants are seen, and they matter while we continue to advocate for unconditional cash for low-income people as policy at the State and/or federal level.

At the same time, we were also encouraged to hear in these conversations that there are many positive effects that the participants carry forward with them. Some described that having the time and extra cash to gain certifications and more education allowed them to get, and keep, better jobs. Others described having their eyes opened to what's available in the community to them—not only in terms of services, but also free or affordable classes and activities that they and their children can continue to use. Some described the positive effect of being given the time and bandwidth to set and make progress toward goals will continue to motivate them going forward.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge and underscore the findings that, *even with housing grants and this extra \$500 in monthly cash, the median Arlington's Guarantee participant still remained severely rent burdened, paying more than 54% of their household income toward housing.*

This highlights the critical need for investment by local and State government in deeply affordable housing and child care infrastructure to address these extreme disparities in our community and prevent the further displacement of our low income neighbors.

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

Scaling up these pilots to permanency through philanthropic dollars or local government funds in Arlington and across the country is not sustainable. Instead, these pilots build the case for a federally funded guaranteed income.

Joining Federal Policy Efforts

Arlington Community Foundation and Arlington County will continue to share their findings and engage in advocacy through the national Guaranteed Income Community of Practice and, in the near term, in state-level efforts to restore monthly child tax credits targeted to low-income households.

In the winter of 2023, ACF joined other philanthropic organizations in the DC region for visits with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to advocate for a national guaranteed income policy. In spring of 2023, ACF hosted Dr. Darrick Hamilton to speak on his vision for a [Human Rights Economy](#), including his proposal for a federal guaranteed income using the US tax code to create an income floor under which no one can fall.

At that event, Arlington County Board members announced by [resolution](#) that they have joined Counties for a Guaranteed Income, making the case for the need for state and federal policies to scale up what local communities like Arlington have demonstrated to be effective in time-limited pilots.

In fall 2023, Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12), announced the reintroduction of the [Guaranteed Income Pilot Program Act](#), legislation that would test the viability of a federally funded income support program to keep American families from experiencing lasting poverty from a single unexpected crisis.

Her office explained: *“The COVID crisis exposed the fragility of our economy ... At the same time, it demonstrated the real and meaningful ability of federal and state programs to keep Americans out of poverty.”*

The GICP recently put out a ten year Blueprint to get to the ultimate goal of federal cash investment in people, delivered on a predictable and regular basis without burdensome administrative requirements, while respecting people’s ability to know what they need most.

State Efforts


Some states have an opportunity to implement large scale, publicly funded programs of their own that provide essential data and experience toward the realization of a federal program. California and Illinois, for example, have large publicly funded programs.

In addition, states are building out their child tax credits (CTCs) and/or earned income tax credits (EITCs) to get regular cash to low-income households. As of the end of 2023, 18 states have passed policies that improved, expanded, or created a CTC or EITC. Many states added provisions to ensure tax credits are accessible for all families— including children of immigrants— and are distributed periodically throughout the year.

In summer 2023, ACF began engaging with Virginia lawmakers and organizing groups toward restoration of a child tax credit (CTC) to resemble the pandemic era expanded child tax credit. **This expanded federal CTC in 2021 was a game changer: it reduced child poverty by 46% by lifting 3.7 million children out of poverty before it was allowed to lapse in 2022. This was effectively a trial of guaranteed income policy by the federal government.** Monthly cash with no strings attached was disbursed by the US Treasury to people in need, while not jeopardizing their eligibility for the public benefits they needed for housing, food, health care, child care and more. ACF has engaged the support of the Economic Security Project, which has successfully led cash tax credit efforts nationally for decades to work with the Virginia legislators.

Arlington's Guarantee partners will continue to use what we have learned from pilot participants to help change the narrative around people in poverty. The message is three-fold:

1. Predictable regular cash with no strings attached provides critical bandwidth to communities that have been long denied access to wealth and assets through punitive benefits systems and racist economic policies. It fills critical gaps but does not replace current social safety net benefits.
2. People know best how to prioritize financial decisions for themselves when given extra resources--whether it's to pay bills, get their car fixed, pay for reliable child care, save for an emergency, get a job certification, or have more time with their children. We must trust them.
3. As important as having increased income and assets is, having a sense of control over one's life goals and a sense of belonging in one's community are essential to a reasonable standard of living with dignity and the overall health of our communities.



**"I
HAVE
MY
DREAMS."**

*Gideon**

**[Click here](#) to read the experiences of Gideon and 10 other participants who shared during the pilot.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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