



www.capitalidea.org
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2013 Annual Report



Years

INNOVATION

INSPIRATION

IMPACT

Proudly serving Central Texas since 1998.

Capital IDEA 2013 Annual Report



From left - Capital IDEA participants Isabel and Bertha, with Capital IDEA Graduate and ACC Professor Teresa Garza at the Whitlow Event in Round Rock.

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“If I had it to do over again, I would enroll in Capital IDEA again. The people were all wonderful and my education was paid for also. Nothing but great/fond memories of this truly great organization!!!”

Jesse Yzaguirre
IT support at DISA
Defense Information Systems Agency
LinkedIn recommendation
November 12, 2013

Messages From our Leaders

Executive Director

In 2013, Capital IDEA marked 15 years serving Central Texas! We've transformed from a fledgling start-up to an established organization. Thank you to the many passionate, talented and dedicated people I have the honor to work with every day. Three of us on staff have already celebrated our 15th anniversary and another seven will reach that milestone within the next 18 months. Thank you especially to our large community of supporters – Board, graduates, Austin Interfaith leaders, employers, business leaders, public officials, administrators, teachers, donors, and so many more! We look forward to the years ahead as we broaden our impact to serve more low-income adults here in Central Texas!



Steve Jackobs | Executive Director Capital IDEA

Board of Directors

I support Capital IDEA because it is proven to work and, more importantly, it changes lives. Capital IDEA helps low-income adults discover their own potential. Last year, we placed our 1,000th adult – Elizabeth Soltero – into career employment (page 5). Like Elizabeth, I'm a first-generation college graduate and so I personally know how valuable and necessary an education can be. Coupled with hard work and determination, our graduates permanently break the cycle of poverty! Elizabeth and each of our graduates prove this. I am both privileged to work with such a transformational organization and thankful for your continued partnership and support.



Juan Garza | Board Chair Capital IDEA | Retired Austin Energy

Austin Interfaith

In the late 90's, employers had good jobs going unfilled while hard-working Central Texans were stuck in dead-end jobs. In partnership with the local business community, Austin Interfaith founded Capital IDEA as a long-term training program to bridge that gap. Since then, we've proven that low-income adults are our community's best opportunity for economic development. The investment we are making in individuals helps create homegrown leaders in our low-income neighborhoods. This past year, 2004 graduate Koreena Malone teamed up with Austin Interfaith on one of our most challenging issues – affordable housing. Take a moment to read about Koreena's leadership (page 4). I think you will be able to envision a future where this community is better and more just for all of us!

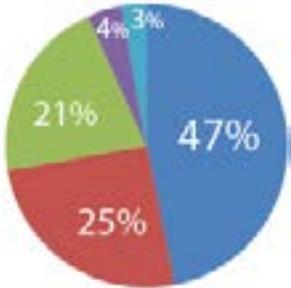


Bob Batlan | Vice Chair Capital IDEA | Austin Interfaith

Capital IDEA at-a-Glance

\$19.06

The average hourly starting wage for Capital IDEA graduates placed in 2013.

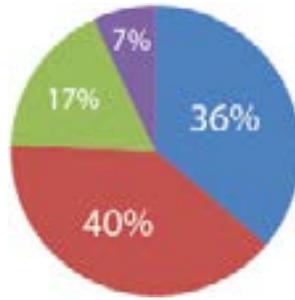


Ethnicity

- Hispanic: 361
- African American/Black: 196
- White/Anglo: 162
- Asian: 30
- Other: 22

2013 Demographics

In 2013 Capital IDEA served 771 low-income Central Texas adults, providing guidance and financial assistance to advance their efforts to earn college-level credentials. 71 Capital IDEA participants graduated from their respective programs.

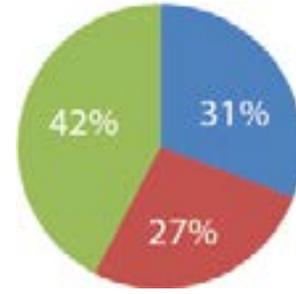


Age

- 18-24 years old: 279
- 25-34 years old: 304
- 35-44 years old: 134
- 45+ years old: 54

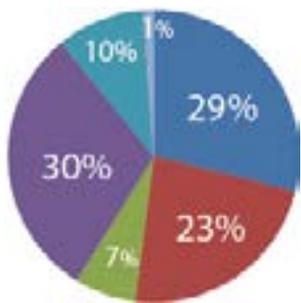
Gender

- Men: 185
- Women: 586



Household

- * Single Parents: 238
- * Two Parents: 206
- No Children: 327
- Total Children: 845

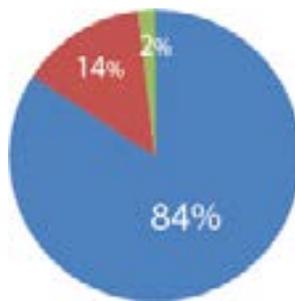


Revenue: \$3,926,432

- City of Austin: \$1,134,383
- Travis County: \$908,723
- Other Public Funds: \$268,802
- Foundation Grants: \$1,186,542
- Individual and Corporate Gifts: \$382,376
- Other Revenue: \$45,606

FY2013 Financials

The financial information below was excerpted from the financial statements and independent auditors' report prepared by Maxwell Locke & Ritter LLP for year ending September 30, 2013, which includes Capital IDEA Houston.



Expenses: \$3,948,028

- Program: \$3,325,028
- Administration: \$549,935
- Fundraising: \$73,065

Assets

Net assets beginning of year: \$804,731

Net assets end of year: \$783,135

Change in net assets: \$(21,596)

Leveraged Funds

Capital IDEA leveraged \$1,603,524 in participant support from Workforce Solutions child care and co-enrollments, utility assistance, pell grants, and scholarships.

A Shining Example of Civic Engagement

A Capital IDEA Graduate Fights for Her Neighborhood and Wins!

This past summer, 2004 Capital IDEA graduate Koreena Malone worked with Austin Interfaith on one of Central Texas' most complex problems: how to redevelop our communities in a way that keeps housing affordable for families of all income levels while also making room for new residents.

Koreena, as President of her Tenants Association, and with the organized support of Austin Interfaith, negotiated a deal with the new owners of Oak Creek Village Apartments in south central Austin. The deal preserves the existing 173 units of affordable housing, keeping those hard-working families in their homes, while allowing for the development of an additional 314 apartments. Below is an excerpt from Koreena's presentation before City Council on June 28, 2013.

"In early 2013, I partnered with Austin Interfaith to form a Tenants Association. Together, we have been working vigorously to ensure that the redevelopment of 2324 Wilson Street is a model community for maintaining affordable housing and preserving local communities.

The Tenants Association held our first meeting in March. This meeting was imperative to the growth of not just the association, but to the community. After all, Oak Creek Village provides 173 homes to 600+ people, including 250 children.

After months of negotiating with (*new owner*) Eureka, and speeches in front of the Planning Commission and the City Council, the Tenants Association is proud to announce that we have reached an agreement with Eureka.

Eureka intends to execute a private restrictive covenant today. The agreement will set a precedent for positive growth in Austin.

This covenant will provide key protections to the tenants and neighborhood including: assuring current affordability levels through reapplication for the HAP contract, increasing safety measures (from 15 to 40 patrol hours a week until further review), safeguards for tenants during the relocation period and a guarantee to provide quality youth programming to the majority of the 250 children who call Oak Creek Village home.

Too often a diverse voice is lacking in the shaping of the city's future. Austin Interfaith leaders and the Tenants Association have proven that a new-found relationship built on respect, tolerance and patience is possible."

Further reading: Austin American-Statesman article - As Austin becomes more expensive, some fight to keep it affordable, Sunday, Jan. 5, 2014
<http://www.mystatesman.com/news/news/as-austin-becomes-more-expensive-some-fight-to-kee/ncc9F/>

Learn more about Austin Interfaith's Affordable Housing Initiatives:
<http://www.austininterfaith.org/campaigns/affordable-housing/>



Koreena Malone at Oak Creek Village Apartments. Photo by Deborah Cannon

"Too often a diverse voice is lacking in the shaping of the city's future."

Koreena Malone

Celebrating Perseverance, Determination and Leadership

Celebration of Achievements

This celebration marked two important milestones for Capital IDEA – the Anniversary of our 15th year of operation proudly serving Central Texas, and our 1,000th career placement!

Graduates of Capital IDEA make numerous personal sacrifices and push themselves to overcome barriers that hold back many of their peers. When their hard work and perseverance pays off, it's time to celebrate! In addition to honoring out 2013 graduates, the Celebration marked two important milestones for Capital IDEA – the Anniversary of our 15th year of operation proudly serving Central Texas, and our 1,000th career placement: Network Administration graduate Elizabeth Soltero. See below for Elizabeth's keynote speech at this year's event. 2013 was a very good year!

A big thank you to our event sponsors: St. David's HealthCare, Maxwell Locke & Ritter, PMG... *Your "Off-Site" Personnel Department!*, and Gray & Becker, P.C.

Keynote: Elizabeth Soltero

Hello. My name is Elizabeth Soltero. I'm very excited to be here today to share my story and to personally thank everyone who contributed to my success. It is incredible what the average person can accomplish with the support of an organization like Capital IDEA.

My husband and I moved to Austin in 2006, after he completed his military service. He worked in construction and I worked part time with a cleaning service. Living within our budget meant only our basic needs were met. We shared one car and worked opposite schedules so we didn't have to pay for childcare for our newborn daughter, Monika. But I dreamed of doing something more with my life. To keep that dream alive, I would enroll in English classes whenever I could, but it was difficult to make progress.

In 2009, a friend told me about Capital IDEA. It was just what I needed! I applied, got accepted and soon enrolled at ACC in both ESL classes and the College Prep Academy.

Working towards my two biggest goals - becoming fluent in English and getting a college education - was a huge commitment. I would take my daughter to work with me then I'd meet my husband on campus so he could take Monika home while I went to class.

My first semester, I struggled with English grammar and it was easy to get discouraged. But Suzanne, my first Capital IDEA Career Navigator, was a great motivator. It made a difference knowing that Suzanne cared about my progress and it was also encouraging to hear from fellow participants during our weekly meetings that their struggles were similar to mine.

When I moved on to my degree track, Network Administration, I failed my first test and my confidence was shaken again. I wasn't always a straight 'A'

(continued on next page)



Elizabeth Soltero, center, with Career Navigators Suzanne Baker and James Hogue

(continued from previous page)

student, but I hadn't failed anything before. And this wasn't just any class, this was my career goal!

I went to talk to my Professor, Anne Cox, and she encouraged me to look at that first test as a baseline that showed us where I had knowledge gaps. She was always helpful and patient, even when I struggled with my third language – technical English.

Many of my classmates already had experience in the IT field but I was determined to keep up. I started arriving early, staying after, and studying well into the night. By the end of the semester, my confidence grew and, more than that, I found that I really loved the hands on work.

In August 2012, I earned an Associate's Degree in Network Administration from ACC and then completed one more semester to finish another Associate's Degree in Systems Security that December. Graduation day was a very happy day! My family and I had sacrificed a lot, but at that moment it was all worth it.

My Capital IDEA Career Navigator while I was in the Network Administration program was James. He kept us focused on employment and prepared us for our job hunt. After graduation, I applied for a position at IBM that I knew was perfect for me. They said they were looking for someone who was ready and eager to learn. Professor Cox had often said that college wasn't supposed to give us all the information we'd ever need. It was going to teach us how to approach new things and how to learn. She was absolutely right. I was hired by IBM as a Server Support Specialist. I had gained exactly the skill set I needed to land my dream job!

When they showed me to my office, I was so excited that I started to cry. It had never even occurred to me that I would have my own office. I truly love my job! I am surrounded by amazing people and my office is now beautifully decorated with my daughter's drawings!

Less than eight months after starting my new job, my husband and I had enough money saved up to put a down payment on a great house. It's twice the size of the small house we were living in before, it is in a good neighborhood, and has a park across the street.

As for my daughter, college is definitely in her future. While I was still in school, I would explain to her that not going to college means you'll work very hard but not always have enough money. With a college degree, you'll have enough for all the things you need and for your family to go on vacations. That convinced her! Monika now wants to be a scientist or a doctor when she grows up.

Whenever someone asks me how I was able to go to school, I explain that Capital IDEA invests in people so that we can change the course of our lives. They trusted in me, more than I trusted in myself.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to work towards a better future for me and my family.



From left - Professor Anne Cox of Austin Community College, and Elizabeth Soltero.

“When they showed me to my office, I was so excited that I started to cry. It had never even occurred to me that I would have my own office.”

Elizabeth Soltero

Aurora Alworth Award: George Prochnow

Aurora Alworth was one of Capital IDEA's first students. While enrolled, she was diagnosed with cancer. Aurora stayed committed to her education, and encouraged others with her upbeat personality. Although Aurora lost her battle with cancer in 2002, her spirit continues to inspire us.

We give the Aurora Alworth Award each year to a graduate who has shown an extraordinary commitment to Capital IDEA's program, who has overcome adversity, excelled academically, and given back to the community.

This year's Aurora Alworth Award went to George Prochnow. George was nominated by his Career Navigator Melissa Maldonado who describes him as "a warm, creative, and outgoing individual who has shown extraordinary dedication to his son, his school work, and his commitment to Capital IDEA."

Before finding out he was going to become a father, George was happily taking a few courses at Austin Community College while making his living working odd jobs such as painting houses, moving furniture, and operating a pedicab. His favorite job was dressing up as a Transformer (a costume he made himself from old motorcycle parts) and entertaining at children's birthday parties.

When George became a single father in 2008, finishing school became a top priority. George wanted his son to have a stable, supportive and educational childhood – a far different experience from his own.

Growing up, George lived with a relative whose attitude towards school was decidedly negative. He would go to school even though it meant having to explain away a black eye, and he often had to find places to hide to complete his homework. He still managed to earn straight A's despite his situation. Even at a young age, George proved that determination could overcome adversity.

George began his pursuit of a degree in Diagnostic Medical Imaging and got accepted into ACC's program in 2001. Although he made it through the first semester on his own, it was extremely difficult to cover tuition, textbooks and other costs. He knew he needed help and that's when he heard about Capital IDEA. Once accepted, George was also connected with the WIA program at Workforce Solutions where he received the last of the financial assistance he needed.

George still had to balance full-time school, part-time work, parenthood, and taking care of his ailing father. But even with his mounting responsibilities, George was absolutely determined to provide a rich educational experience for his son. To manage that, George arranged to volunteer 25 hours a week at his son's Montessori school in exchange for tuition. Later, he also volunteered at Child Inc., working breakfast and lunch shift, serving on the parent policy council and taking on several leadership roles. He also a volunteer coach for his son's various sports teams.

With Capital IDEA's support, George powered through the rest of his degree program and graduated as a Diagnostic Medical Imaging Technologist from ACC in 2013. He is preparing to take the board exam, and soon after will be looking for employment with one of the local major hospital systems.

For his positive outlook and persistence despite adversity, and his dedication to both his and his son's education, Capital IDEA selected George Prochnow as the recipient of the 2013 Aurora Alworth Award.



George Prochnow and son George - big smiles on graduation day at Austin Community College Eastview Campus.

Mark Melliar-Smith Emerging Leader Award: Anne Arellano

For the second year Capital IDEA recognized a current participant with the Emerging Leader Award named in honor of founding Board member Mark Melliar-Smith. Anne Arellano was celebrated as this year's emerging leader.

Anne already demonstrates a high level of community leadership. She uses her energy, humor, and intelligence to serve others and lead by example. She is currently an LVN student at Austin Community College, on track to graduate this coming May, and plans to continue on to the RN program as soon as possible. Anne is married with four children, and like many Capital IDEA participants, she has had to juggle full-time studies and part-time work, along with her family responsibilities.

Beyond all of this, Anne also finds the time and energy to be involved by volunteering her time and taking on leadership roles. When elected as the Vice-President of the student vocational nursing association, Anne found meaningful ways for the students to support each other and build a community. Twice when classmates lost loved ones, Anne organized collections for the families. The unexpected support not only helped them during their time of grief, but also enabled both students to continue their studies.

When Board Members of the prestigious Greater Texas Foundation visited Austin Community College, Anne was invited to speak before them and share her story. The entire group was thoroughly impressed with Anne, and even went so far as to ask how it was possible to accomplish so much with four children at home. Without missing a beat, Anne matter-of-factly replied, "No one is too young for chores."

Congratulations Anne!

"I love sharing Capital IDEA's heart. The aim is to lift families out of poverty, dust them off, and help re-direct them. To shine light on our life's dream and to help us achieve those dreams. They knew I would make it to graduation before I even started. Before I even believed that I would make it. I feel like a "Thank you" is so small in comparison to all that Capital IDEA has done for me and my family.

If I could encourage anyone here today, I would remind them that small steps are better than no steps. You're moving forward, so keep moving. You are here today because Capital IDEA has touched your life in some way and when you have nothing to give, you will always have your voice and you will always have your story." -Anne



Hector (husband) and Anne Arellano holding her award.

"I love sharing Capital IDEA's heart. The aim is to lift families out of poverty, dust them off, and help re-direct them. To shine light on our life's dream and to help us achieve those dreams."

Anne Arellano

Capital IDEA Graduates of 2013

“I want to thank my Career Navigator, Suzanne. You gave me support and encouragement through my student life. You are always ready whenever I need help. Thank you so much for all of your hard work for me.”

Lian San Cing, LVN

Accounting Technician

Mary Lou Ponce

Automotive Technologist

Daymon Grubbs

Jonas Guevara

Computer Aided Design

Samantha McCuiston

Igor Petreski

Dental Hygienist

Andrea Garza

Diagnostic Medical Imaging Technologist

Jonathan Albert

Ayub Haile

George Prochnow

Gabriela Rangel-Wong

Laura Velasco Perez

Education, Special Ed

Michael Ortiz

Electrician Apprentice

Edan Brand

Health Information Technologist

Gracia Lopez

Vanessa Santos

Linda Struthers

Heating, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Technologist

Robert Cranfill

Heith Hernandez

Licensed Vocational Nurse

Jessica Avelar

Naomi Bray

Shannon Burns

Lori Bush

Lian Cing

Becki Jablonski

Jessica Jackson

Andrea Lewis

Maria Loreda

Sonia Martinez

Rosemary Matsikidze

Peter Mwasakibinga

Elizabeth Santamaria Chavez

Aristides Tchamani

Taccara Wright

Medical Lab Technologist

Hang Luong

Natalia Nguyen

Rosina Villanueva

Network Administrator

Susan Griffith

Ziad Katay

Irasema Marmolejo

Gregorio Mendez

Moffat Muriithi



Network Administrator

(Continued)

Long Tran

Eric Wells

Ophthalmic Technician

Theresa Alba

Angela Boyd

Cidney Modesty

Tiffany Smaby

Pharmacy Technician

Andrea Carter

Kalia Ellis

Bianka Estrada

Registered Nurse

Haruna Asafotei

Tramaine Barnes

Michael Barrilleaux

Jessica Castillo

Eric Changeh

John Clynes

Sara Cruz-Cuevas

Registered Nurse

(Continued)

Hilda Hernandez

Amy Kale

Maria Lopez

Yvette Nunez

Julia Price

William Ratliff

Isela Rodriguez

Mary Elizabeth Spinhirne

Jessica Ybarra

Respiratory Therapist

Sarah Velasquez

Surgical Technologist

Tien Chu

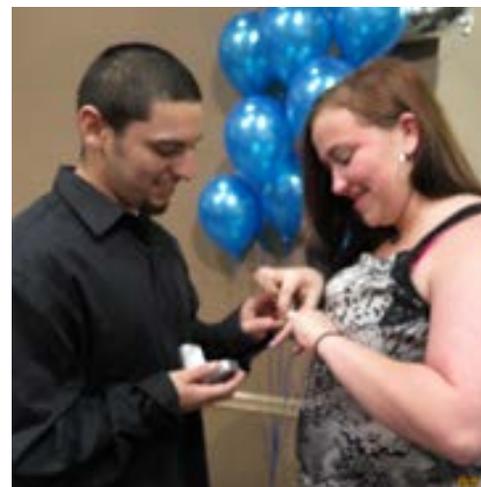
Truck Driving

Abel Magallanez

Video Game Art

Joseph Maniscalco

Erik Vasquez



Abel Magallanez, 2013 Capital IDEA graduate, supported through our partnership with LifeWorks Young Father's Program, took the opportunity during this year's Celebration to propose to his girlfriend and got a 'Yes.' Congratulations to the happy couple!

Year in Review - Highlights from 2013

March: Amplify Austin

Capital IDEA was one of hundreds of local non-profits to participate in I Live Here, I Give Here's first Amplify Austin 24-hour "festival of giving" held March 4-5, 2013. Our goal was to raise \$5,000 in a short 24 hours. With enthusiastic support from individual donors and a nearly seventeen hundred dollar match from the St. David's Foundation we came very close to our goal. Our total for the day was \$4,882. Capital IDEA will participate in Amplify Austin again, March 20-21, 2014. Our profile is available year round at: <https://amplifyatx.iliveheregivehere.org/capitalidea>



“The demand for workers with the right skills is only going to grow. By partnering with Capital IDEA, we’re able to give students extra support to reach their goals.”

Dr. Richard Rhodes
ACC President/CEO

Capital IDEA, ACC Partnership Expansion

Austin Community College and Capital IDEA are partnering to help more students succeed in health sciences and accelerate their entry into the workforce. As part of a national consortium of six community college/nonprofit partnerships, ACC was awarded a \$2 million Department of Labor grant to develop a Health Professions Academy with Capital IDEA. The Academy represents a new approach to prerequisite courses for health sciences programs that enables students to start working in the healthcare field from the outset of their education.

Dr. Richard Rhodes, ACC president/CEO says: “The demand for workers with the right skills is only going to grow. By partnering with Capital IDEA, we’re able to give students extra support to reach their goals.”

At the beginning of the program, students complete a short-term certification to become a certified nurse assistant or phlebotomist – enabling them to work in the healthcare industry while continuing their education. The Academy also incorporates redesigned, interactive curriculum that uses technology to individualize each student’s experience in prerequisite courses such as biology, anatomy, and physiology. With these new course elements, we expect to raise students’ success rates and reduce their time to graduation.

“Employers rely a lot on ACC for talent and training. Capital IDEA has earned a strong reputation for its student success rates and support services. This important partnership should have big benefits for Central Texas,” says Drew Scheberle, senior vice president for education and talent development at the Austin Chamber of Commerce.

This past September, ACC and Capital IDEA hosted representatives from the national consortium and the Aspen Institute to hear directly from students involved in the partnership and to see first-hand the Biology Innovations Lab.

May: Participant Survey Results

Each April, Capital IDEA conducts a customer service survey of current participants. In 2013 we had a great response. Here are a few of the results.

Our participants are highly committed: 94.5% rated their commitment to completing the program as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’!

Our participants would recommend us: 98% said yes, they would recommend us to their family and friends!

Our participants are breaking cycles: 54% said they will be the first generation in their family to graduate from college.

Areas we are working to improve: 10% said that they did not always receive returned emails or calls within 24 hours, and 7% would like more time spent talking about options if they start to struggle academically or financially.

“My navigators are insanely awesome and supportive!”

“I feel like I have someone in my corner.”

“I’m thankful to God that Capital IDEA and I met.”



Theresa Soto, Capital IDEA Career Navigator, second from left, presented at the Aspen Institute Consortium along with three participants, from left, Lori, Erica and Miriam.

Summer: Supporters at City Hall

Capital IDEA Board Chair Juan Garza, Vice Chair Bob Batlan, Members Oralia Garza de Cortés and Ben Eynon, and Graduates Michele Monreal, Henry Vines and Jennifer McFarlin were among the hundreds of stakeholders who voiced their support for Capital IDEA at City Hall throughout the summer in 2013.

In June, Gabriel Monreal, son of 2003 graduate Michele Monreal, joined his mother at City Hall to speak in support of Capital IDEA:

Michele: *When I started with Capital IDEA in 1999, I was struggling to raise my son and support myself on \$8.50 an hour with no benefits, and was dependent on Section 8 for housing. Like many working poor adults, I had a strong desire to provide more for my child, and was willing to work hard to better our circumstances.*

Capital IDEA took that desire, laid out a path to meet my goals, and helped me address every barrier in my way. Since my graduation in 2003, I have received a number of commendations for the work I do, and I have nearly tripled my income. I am now a Lead Surgical Tech at St. David's Hospital.

Gabriel: *My mother's decision to go to college set a new standard for me that wasn't there before. As a child witnessing her success and seeing our circumstances change, I realized how important education can be. There was no question that I would go to college, and I knew my mom could show me how to get there. I am now a Junior at Texas State University, working towards my Bachelors in Healthcare Administration.*

Your investment not only gave her the opportunity for self-sufficiency and a career, it gave me an excellent example to follow, and established a respect for education that I'll pass down to my own children someday.

After months of meetings, testimony, and efforts by Austin Interfaith leaders, business leaders, and Capital IDEA alumni, the Austin City Council on September 9th moved Capital IDEA's contract to its Economic Development Department and increased funding by \$200,000. Council Member Mike Martinez made the motion and Council voted 5-1 in support.

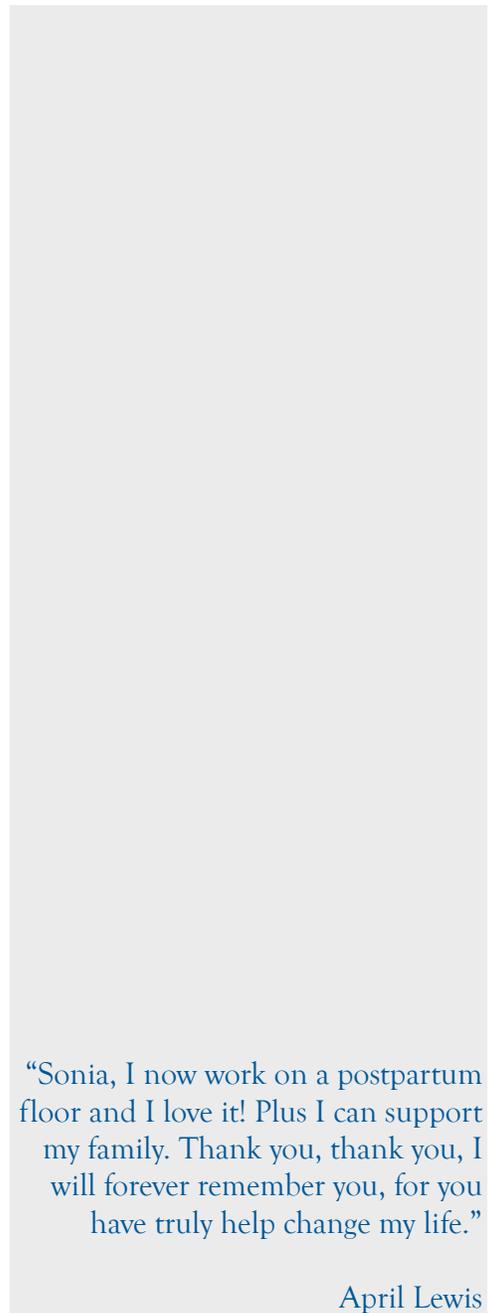
"The new relationship with the Department marks a return to the original economic development purpose of Capital IDEA as created by the 1997 agreement with Samsung," says Steve Jackobs, Executive Director.

September: Because of You! Breakfast

Monday, September 9, 2013 was a Career Navigator appreciation day hosted by Board Member and Alumni Representative Eloina Serna. The Alumni quickly raised \$420 in donations, well above the initial goal of \$100. The Alumni treated the Career Navigators to a delicious hot breakfast, small gifts, and best of all, dozens of personal notes thanking the Navigators for their hard work. A big thanks to our Alumni for making this wonderful day possible, the Navigators were overjoyed.



From left - Gabriel Monreal, Junior at Texas State University, with mother Michele Monreal, Capital IDEA graduate and Lead Surgical Tech at St. David's Hospital.



"Sonia, I now work on a postpartum floor and I love it! Plus I can support my family. Thank you, thank you, I will forever remember you, for you have truly help change my life."

April Lewis



From left - George White with Rep. Larry Gonzales, and Dale Illig with Rep. Marsha Farney

October: Whitlow Good Neighbor Event

The 2013 Whitlow Good Neighbor event, held on Sunday, October 6 at the United Heritage Center at the Dell Diamond, was a huge success! Through the generosity of our donors, the 2013 bi-annual event raised nearly \$80,000 to support Williamson County residents in Capital IDEA.

Honored at this event were the 2013 Whitlow Good Neighbors George White and Dale Illig, two pillars of the Williamson County community.

Keynote: Johanna Fite

Hello, my name is Johanna Fite. I am 39 years old and, for the first time in my life, I have a career that allows me to support my family without working multiple jobs or depending on public assistance.

I dropped out of high school at age 15. During the next 6 years, I got my GED, was married, had three children, and enrolled at Austin Community College. I inched my way through remedial classes, making little progress until I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD. With the right learning accommodations, I was able to complete the nursing certificate program. It was a big achievement but now that I understood how my brain worked, I really wanted a college degree and to become a Registered Nurse.

In 2001 I returned to ACC, but over the next decade life took one unfortunate turn after another. My husband went through multiple layoffs and months of unemployment. My mother needed a series of major surgeries. Then, my brother came back from Iraq in critical condition. Every minute that I wasn't in school or at work I was in a hospital. Thankfully both my brother and my mother pulled through and I was able to help them both recover.

In 2011, I was finally accepted into the RN program. The day before classes started, after all that my mother had lived through, she was killed by a drunk driver. My two nephews were also badly injured in the crash. All of our savings went to funeral expenses and lawyer fees. My nephews came to live with me along with my pregnant twenty-year old daughter and her boyfriend.

On top of all of that, I still needed books I couldn't afford, I owed tuition, and I couldn't get approved for the learning accommodations I'd gotten previously. I was completely overwhelmed and crying in a campus bathroom when I saw, taped to the door, a flyer for Capital IDEA! I applied and got accepted.

Capital IDEA bought my books, covered my tuition, and helped me with childcare expenses. My Career Navigator, Maria, encouraged me, checked on me, made a point of offering help anytime she could. I was also finally able to retest and got re-approved for learning accommodations.

I graduated from Austin Community College with my Associate Degree in Nursing last summer. I recently accepted a position at the Office of Inspector General as a Utilization Review Nurse Specialist IV. I have a great career and I love my job. Every day I say to myself "I can't believe I get paid to do this!" Thank you all, for your support and for being my Good Neighbor.

"Maria encouraged me, checked on me, and knowing that I didn't like asking for help, made a point of offering help anytime she could."

Johanna Fite, RN



Johanna Fite (center) with her daughter and husband at the 2013 Whitlow Good Neighbor Ice Cream Social.

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