



AMERICAN IDEA
★ FOUNDATION ★

2023 Progress Report



Paul D. Ryan



Former Speaker of the House
& President of the American Idea
Foundation

Measuring Results
Expanding Opportunity
Improving Lives.



www.AmericanIdeaFoundation.com





2023 Progress Report

Upon leaving Congress in 2019, former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan redoubled his commitment to advancing solutions that reduce poverty and expand economic opportunities for all Americans. This commitment stemmed from his desire to help individuals pursue their version of the American Dream and a sense of frustration over the federal government's failure to prioritize results and evidence, particularly when it came to helping people get back on their feet.

In 2019, to channel these sentiments in a productive way, Ryan launched the American Idea Foundation (AIF), a non-partisan, not-for-profit charity whose mission is to support front-line organizations working on evidence-based solutions with a track record of alleviating problems being faced by Americans.

The American Idea Foundation believes by taking the politics out of poverty-fighting and focusing on results, successful programs can be scaled, elevated, and replicated. In Ryan's view, this approach – prioritizing what works and validating these interventions with evidence—should provide the government with a clearer blueprint to better address the challenges facing individuals and communities across the United States.



It is why the American Idea Foundation actively partners with organizations to help build repositories of data that can validate innovative strategies. The Foundation believes by providing funds, offering strategic advice, and raising awareness about evidence-based approaches, Americans who are in need will be better off.

The mission of the American Idea Foundation is to expand the “American Idea” by fighting poverty, expanding upward mobility, and deepening the use of evidence and data in decision-making. AIF does this by identifying groups and organizations around the country living this mission and supports their efforts in the following ways:

1.

The Foundation provides direct funding, via annual grants, to community-led organizations so these groups can work with academic partners to validate their approaches through data and evidence.

2.

The Foundation brings policymakers and local leaders to these organizations and explains first-hand why these programs are working, what evidence validates their success, and how these solutions can be scaled and replicated in other parts of the country.

3.

The Foundation utilizes Speaker Ryan's public profile to shine a light on programs, policies, and solutions with demonstrated track records of improving outcomes.



Supporting Impactful Organizations, Promoting Evidence-Based Interventions

With polarization, partisanship, and cynicism on the rise in America, the American Idea Foundation believes that leaders have an obligation to strengthen civil society and support organizations making a tangible difference in people's lives. After 25 years in Congress, Paul knows the answers to all of America's problems are not necessarily found in Washington, they are found in our neighborhoods and in our communities.

In 2022, the Foundation issued grants to a handful of groups developing evidence-based solutions to address issues like recidivism, financial literacy and entrepreneurship in underserved communities, early childhood health, and family well-being. Throughout the year, Ryan and his Foundation visited these organizations, shared its policy expertise, and elevated the groups' efforts in a variety of ways. It replicated and expanded on those efforts in 2023 with a new round of grant recipients.



In announcing the Foundation's 2023 grant recipients, Ryan said:

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“Working with these amazing organizations and supporting their evidence-based approaches to fighting poverty is one of the most rewarding parts of my post-Congressional career. These groups are simply amazing. Their work is inspiring.

Last year, I spent time with two of our grant recipients, Gatekeepers in Hagerstown and Corner to Corner in Nashville, and saw first-hand the profound impact these organizations have. Our grant recipients are transforming communities, building ecosystems of support, and lifting people up. These groups and their leaders are committed to developing evidence that validate their approaches and I truly believe this is how America will move the needle on poverty.

This isn't about partisanship or politics. It is about solving problems, helping people, and making the American Dream more accessible. These groups are doing precisely that.”





This year, the Foundation provided funds and support to the following organizations.

1. **Bernie's Book Bank**



Located in Chicago, Illinois, Bernie's Book Bank creates pathways to success through book ownership by providing families access to books and giving children reading materials of their own. Founded in 2009, Bernie's Book Bank has long believed reading is one of the most important skills a child can possess which is why it gives free, quality books to children to build personal libraries.

Since its founding, Bernie's Book bank has sourced, processed, and distributed over 25 million books and delivered them directly to the children they serve via school districts and early childhood programs in the Chicagoland area. The story and growth of Bernie's Book Bank is astonishing. They have helped countless children learn how to read and develop comprehension skills which lay the foundation for more educational opportunities and a pathway out of poverty.

The financial support provided by the Foundation in 2023 will be used for a quantitative study to determine the benefits of book ownership. The randomized controlled study will focus on 11,000 elementary school students and will run over three years. Bernie's Book Bank has interim findings showing that the program helps improve academic achievement and are hoping the study expands their understanding of how to improve literacy outcomes.

2. **Bottom Line**



Originally located in Boston, MA before expanding nationally, Bottom Line partners with degree-aspiring students of color from under-resourced communities to help them get into college, through college, and out into the workforce.

Founded in 1997, Bottom Line does this by pairing mentors with first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds, shepherding students through the college application process, and sticking with them throughout college by offering one-on-one support through graduation. Bottom Line's goal is to create a far-reaching ripple effect by using the transformative power of a college degree to mobilize careers that lift up individuals, families, and communities.

Bottom Line currently serves 7,000 students and has standardized their approach through their Access Program. They are partnering with 53 target colleges where Bottom Line Success Advisors work with students for up to 6 years. The result, as evidenced in a 2021 randomized controlled trial, is that Bottom Line students are 23% more likely to earn a college degree in 4 years. Bottom Line's goal is to expand their reach to 20,000 students by 2030 and continue closing the racial equity gap in education in an evidence-based way. The Foundation's support will help them realize these goals.



3. **Brigid's Path**



Founded in 2014, Brigid's Path is the first in-patient, newborn recovery center in Ohio. The organization's primary purpose is to care for infants who were born exposed to an addictive substance like opioids or other drugs. At a critical stage in a newborn's development, the medical staff and volunteers of Brigid's Path shower them with love and attention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Since 2017, Brigid's Path has helped 214 babies and in 2023, the organization will care for around 70 babies and families. They provide immediate medical care to newborns but also offer wrap-around services and support for their families on a 1 to 1 basis.

Because of Brigid's Path, in 2022, 90% of the babies treated went home last year with a parent or family member. Without the organization, 77% of those babies would have been sent directly to the foster care system. The cost for Brigid's Path 24-7 services is also significantly less expensive than a hospital so there is an economic benefit to the program.

Support by the Foundation for Brigid's Path will help provide holistic care for babies and moms dealing with substance use disorder and allow the organization to conduct a Transformation Survey at the time of an infant's discharge, which will better assess the impact of the program. Brigid's Path has produced powerful stories of transformation as children and mothers benefit tremendously from their support and funds provided by the Foundation will be used to quantify the program's impact in a scientific way.

4. **Friends of the Children**



Friends of the Children is a national non-profit organization operating in 33 different communities. It selects and invites youth – all of whom have unique talents, interests, and dreams, and face multiple systemic obstacles – to be paired with a paid, professional mentor called a Friend. The organization hires and trains Friends to support youth from as early as age 4 through high school graduation. They are a long-term intervention and the Friends' full-time job is to empower and support youths and their caregivers.

Friends of the Children revolutionized the youth mentoring field by creating the first and only long-term professional mentoring program in the country. Each child gets a dedicated, one-on-one Friend who listens to their hopes and dreams. Friends spend a minimum of 14 to 16 intentional hours per month with each child. They encourage their child to set – and achieve – specific goals and create meaningful experiences that empower youth to build life skills and make healthy choices.

Friends of the Children is regularly collecting data and conducting evaluations to study the program's impact. Funds provided by the American Idea Foundation will help Friends of the Children continue participating in its 2nd generation, longitudinal randomized controlled trial. With this support, the organization will grow its base of evidence and better understand how the program can deepen its impact.



5. Per Scholas



A nationally recognized non-profit with campuses in 20 cities, Per Scholas believes a thriving workforce starts with equitable access to education. To accomplish this goal, they have created an evidence-based, professional development program that provides individuals with tuition-free technology training and skills for high-growth careers.

Aiming to educate 4,500 students in 2023, Per Scholas provides customized training and job placement services for low-income workers focusing primarily on the information technology sector. Participants of the Per Scholas program receive 15 weeks of occupational skills training in information technology, career readiness services (e.g., assistance in resume and interview preparation), and job development and placement services.

Per Scholas has been the subject of two randomized controlled evaluations and the evidence of both was promising. In 2022, more than 1,700 Per Scholas graduates secured jobs paying an average hourly wage of over \$23.50 per hour, collectively earning nearly \$85 million in first-year wages alone. The funds provided by the Foundation will be utilized for a randomized controlled trial and to expand enrollment in Per Scholas' programs.

6.

Wisconsin Inmate Education Association



WISCONSIN INMATE
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The Wisconsin Inmate Education Association is focusing on helping men and women incarcerated in the Wisconsin prison system transform their lives through the completion of an in-prison college curriculum which provides them with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biblical Studies.

By encouraging inmates to embrace an alternative identity centered around faith and education, WIEA believes their intervention will lower levels of misconduct, stimulate spiritual transformations, and improve families and communities by changing behaviors for the better. The Wisconsin Inmate Education Association's approach is evidence-based and they measure success by looking at factors like personal transformation, violence reduction, community and family impact, and recidivism reduction. By helping those currently incarcerated, the Association aims to create a ripple effect that reduces criminal behavior both within the correctional system and outside of it.



7. Women's Bean Project



Located in Denver, CO, the Women's Bean Project is a transitional employment program serving women who have struggled to obtain and maintain employment. The organization's goal is to change women's lives by providing them stepping stones to self-sufficiency through work.

The Women's Bean Project helps participants through a case-management model with a team of social service providers and community partners helping women, many of whom were recently incarcerated or are battling substance use disorders, through a 6–9-month program. The women complete 60 hours of classroom work with instruction provided on topics like financial literacy, computer skills, and dressing for success.



The Women's Bean Project teaches participants these skills while also having them assist with running a successful business that provides a variety of products to retailers and markets across the country. Since its founding, the Women's Bean Project has blossomed into a successful commercial enterprise and their products are now sold in 1,000 stores nationwide. They generated over \$2 million in revenue last year.

The anecdotal evidence in support of their program is incredibly strong, as is their internal data. Their historic employment rate is 92% and the average wage for graduates is nearly \$15 per hour. Given these promising outcomes, American Idea Foundation funds will be used by the Women's Bean Project to start a robust randomized controlled trial to hopefully show the program has a positive impact.

Lesson from the Frontlines:

Pittsburgh Post Gazette: Real Solutions Need Real Principles



Beyond providing financial support, the American Idea Foundation feels strongly that bringing lawmakers, local leaders, and community partners to these front-line organizations is a unique value Paul Ryan can add as these groups look to promote and scale their successful strategies.

In early September, joined by Congressmen Brad Wenstrup & Mike Turner, Mayor Peggy Lehner, and community partners from around Dayton, Ohio, Speaker Ryan toured Brigid's Path to learn more about their efforts to save newborns and stem the rising tide of opioid addiction.

The elected leaders visited the medical recovery facility, participated in a roundtable with mothers and their babies who received treatment at Brigid's Path, and spoke with medical professionals about the organization's approach to nursing newborns back to health.



Salena Zito of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* covered the visit, reporting in part:

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The first thing Mr. Ryan heard as he walked into the lobby were the gentle sounds of babies — lots of babies. The Janesville, Wis., native and father of three smiled broadly and headed toward the rooms where nurses were cuddling and monitoring newborns suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome, which is a result of babies having been exposed to drugs prior to birth.

Mr. Ryan spent several hours touring the facility with local community leaders and Ohio U.S. Reps. Mike Turner and Brad Wenstrup, as they discussed the facility’s impact serving young mothers — and their infants — caught in the rising tide of opioid addiction. Sitting in the conference room at Brigid’s Path, Mr. Ryan was dressed casually, with comfortable shoes — no tie, no entourage.

Mr. Ryan was visibly moved by the infants he saw and had a powerful back-and-forth with a mother during a roundtable with stakeholders after the tour. Accompanied by her precocious and now healthy 18-month-old daughter, the mother candidly discussed her journey from addiction, to prison, to bringing her then-infant here 18 months ago.

Her answers to Mr. Ryan’s questions were so raw and frank that a pin drop would have shattered the hush.

“I’ve been spending the better part of my adult life on poverty issues,” Mr. Ryan explained afterward. His involvement began with his work with former HUD Secretary Jack Kemp and continued as a member of Congress.

Mr. Ryan said he traveled — without fanfare, incognito — to high-crime and drug-infested neighborhoods with civil rights activist Bob Woodson in order to understand from the ground up what drove the despair. “Woodson told me at the time it was a commitment — not a drive-up, drop-in. When I went, I went for the duration,” he said.

“It gave me a clear-eyed understanding of the roots of poverty, as well as the impact.”

It’s the vocation he said he has chosen since he has retired: “I do other things, but this foundation I founded, the American Idea Foundation, helps fund remarkable places like this place here to scale and replicate those poverty programs elsewhere....”

Mr. Ryan said his sweet spot on making a difference in the world is mixing empathy and compassion with data.

“That is why I’m a conservative. I believe in the role of civil society. I believe in the role that communities have, and I believe in the role of personal responsibility, upper mobility and people helping each other. Catholics, we call it subsidiarity.”

Mr. Ryan said it is something he has always taken to heart: “It is the most effective philosophy to doing the most good for the most people, and it’s the best way for society to govern itself.”

This site visit is just one example showcasing how the American Idea Foundation is buttressing organizations making real, tangible impacts in communities across the country. The strategies being used by Brigid’s Path and all of the 2023 grant recipients are evidence-based and with additional data supporting them, the Foundation’s hope is these programs can be scaled and replicated. Ultimately, promoting solutions with track records of success is how America can overcome partisan divides when it comes to fighting poverty and really make a difference in people’s lives.



Talking to the Next Generation

Advancing Policies & Programs to Expand Upward Mobility

The Foundation has continued to use Speaker Ryan's platform as a recent leader of the House of Representatives to lend a voice to the public policy challenges facing our nation. In particular, throughout 2023, the Foundation visited a series of think tanks and a dozen college campuses where Speaker Ryan talked to the next generation of American leaders about policies that expand economic opportunities.

In September, Ryan visited Utah Valley University in Orem, UT to serve as a guest lecturer at an event held by the Governor Gary Herbert Institute for Public Policy. While on campus, Ryan spoke with UVU students and the wider university community about the short-term and long-term challenges facing America. Ryan's message to students was:



“ I teach economics at the University of Notre Dame but I also go around the country speaking with young people. It's a good use of my time, frankly. I want to talk to young people about the future of their country and the need to get involved and solve the problems that we have. But talking to young people also gives me sustenance because you meet with these really wonderful young people who are doing incredible things and it gives me hope and confidence for the future.

“What I'm encouraged most about is young people are looking at the hyperpolarization that is engulfing our country lately and engulfing democracy. They're seeing this and saying: 'This doesn't look right. I don't like this. What can we do about this?' And younger Americans' desire to solve these problems is so encouraging to me.”

Earlier in September, Ryan served as the policymaker in residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs. Delivering a lecture on evidence-based policymaking to a full house in the Alumni Memorial Union, Ryan touched on the impact of polarization and how younger Americans can elevate our civil discourse. His advice to students was simple:

“ Get out of your cocoon. Spend time with people who do not look or think like you. Do not impugn people's motives. You have two ears and one mouth, so use them in that proportion. These were all good pieces of advice that my mom always gave me.”



Also this year, Ryan hosted a panel discussion on evidence-based poverty programs at the American Enterprise Institute. The conversation featured two 2022 American Idea Foundation grant recipients, Shana Berkeley of Corner to Corner and Bill Gaertner of Gatekeepers. In discussing their work, Ryan said:

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Typically, what we have is policymakers speaking to people telling them what they ought to do and how they ought to make a positive change, but today, we're reversing those roles. We're going to hear from poverty-fighters about what policymakers can do to make a big difference and improve people's lives when it comes to fighting poverty.

“I visited both of these institutions, Gatekeepers and Corner to Corner, and they're doing really impressive work. Gatekeepers works with individuals both inside and outside of prison to make sure that they're making good on their second chance. Gatekeepers is often the very first stop that returning citizens make on their way out of prison and Corner to Corner is doing amazing work promoting entrepreneurship. I've seen it firsthand. It's really something that's exciting to watch and witness.... So, everyone should be excited to learn from these individuals who are fighting poverty and directly improving people's lives. “



Speaking to students on college campuses from Boston, MA to South Bend, IN, Speaker Ryan has continued to drive home the importance of using evidence and data as a tool to overcome rising partisanship and polarization. In conversations with legislators and industry leaders, the Foundation has promoted ideas like fiscal responsibility, reducing inflation, and finding consensus in times of divided government.

Paul will continue to speak out in favor of sensible solutions that help all Americans achieve their version of the American dream and his Foundation will continue supporting those organizations and initiatives making a tangible impact in people's lives.



“If we’re going to preserve the American idea, it’s going to take all of us working together. Supporting organizations doing the hard but amazing work on the front-lines of our communities is incredibly valuable as leaders craft public policies to promote upward mobility.

“By focusing on evidence-based strategies with proven track records of success and by allocating resources based on results, not partisan preferences, I know we will make meaningful progress in the war on poverty. I’m grateful the American Idea Foundation can play a small role in this effort and bring attention to deserving interventions.”

— AIF PRESIDENT & FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER **PAUL RYAN**



To learn more about the American Idea Foundation, please visit:

www.AmericanIdeaFoundation.com

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