

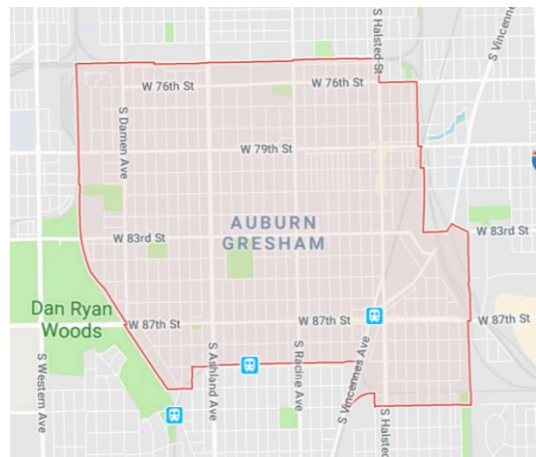
# Case Statement: Auburn Gresham – A Beacon of Hope and Opportunity



“BECOME is a 501(c)3 community and societal transformation organization that facilitates grassroots community leadership and co-creates innovative solutions to help communities achieve collective liberation. We collaborate with communities to develop sustainable solutions, expand community capacity to implement those solutions, and create lasting movement toward a shared vision.”

## Introduction

Auburn Gresham, a vibrant, predominantly Black neighborhood on Chicago’s Southwest Side, is home to a resilient community ready to transform itself into a hub of education, entrepreneurship, and opportunity. For too long, Auburn Gresham has faced poverty, violence, and systemic neglect. Yet, its strengths—the people, culture, and local institutions—are boundless. With the support of BECOME’s Culturally Responsive Community Transformation (CRCT) initiative, Auburn Gresham is on the path to becoming a model of what a cohesive, empowered community can achieve.



## Strengthening the Community’s Assets

While Auburn Gresham has faced considerable hardships, the strengths of the community far outweigh its challenges. Its residents are not just survivors; they are agents of change, driving initiatives in economic development, safety, and youth empowerment. This is a community full of potential, with local heroes whose stories of resilience inspire action and leadership.

For instance, Devon, one of the community’s shining examples, was the first in his family to attend college. He returned to Auburn Gresham as a successful entrepreneur and mentor, determined to uplift the next generation. Devon’s story represents the heart of our work in

CRCT—helping individuals and groups transform their lives and conditions so that they can reinvest in the community and help transform the lives of others.

## **Our Vision: A Beacon of Education and Opportunity**



Our long-term goal is bold: Auburn Gresham will become a bastion of education and opportunity, a place where families thrive, children dream big, and individuals achieve lasting success. The community will be a model of collective growth, free from violence, where residents create sustainable, thriving lives. Auburn Gresham will not just be a better place for its residents—it will serve as an inspiration to neighborhoods around the country and beyond.

Imagine a neighborhood where all young people not only graduate high school but pursue higher education and meaningful careers, local businesses are owned and operated by residents, and community safety is maintained through mutual care rather than reliance on external forces. This is the future we are building.

## **Creating Real Impact: Individual Success Stories**

In the heart of this transformation are the real stories of people whose lives have been touched by CRCT.

Kim Ammons

- Returned to Auburn Gresham as an adult, determined to support the next generation with a community center that provides everything from wellness programs to trade apprenticeships. Her dream is a vision for the entire community; where Auburn Gresham's youth can find refuge, guidance, and opportunity.

Moses Williams

- Envisions Auburn Gresham as a hub for urban agriculture, where families learn to grow their own food and create sustainable businesses within the green economy. His vision of food sovereignty is part of a broader economic revitalization, a move toward local entrepreneurship and generational wealth building.

These stories highlight the heart of our work. Our mission is not just to improve the present conditions in Auburn Gresham, but to enable the people here to create wonder in the world. Each success story is the beginning of a ripple effect, as these individuals reinvest their skills, leadership, and resources into the community and beyond.





## **The Missing Link: Broader Impact**

Investing in Auburn Gresham is not just about changing one neighborhood—it's about creating a blueprint for change that can be applied globally.

## What is Culturally Responsive Community Transformation?

At BECOME, we believe that the best solutions come from within communities themselves. Our CRCT model brings residents together, equipping them to turn their insights into action and drive change in their own neighborhoods. We envision thriving, self-sustained communities where everyone can succeed.

### The CRCT Process

	<b>RESEARCH:</b> We begin by deeply engaging with communities to understand their unique needs and aspirations. Through listening sessions and outreach activities, we build trust and gather direct insights from residents. Community members vote to identify priority areas to address.
	<b>INNOVATION:</b> With these insights, we equip community members with the tools and skills to collaboratively develop solutions. Groups assigned to each of the three priority areas engage in a year-long process of 27 workshops. They uncover the root causes of local issues, recognize their individual and collective strengths, and develop actionable plans in partnership with neighbors and local institutions. By the end of this phase, residents have concrete plans and established action teams ready to implement new, community-powered systems.
	<b>IMPLEMENTATION:</b> With plans in place, we support residents and local institutions to bring solutions to life. Through our strategies toolbox—including culturally-responsive program development and community organizing—BECOME's experts provide resources and training to ensure effective implementation of the community-led projects.
	<b>EVALUATION AND SUSTAINABILITY:</b> To ensure lasting impact, we train community members as resident evaluators through our Community Evaluation Innovation Lab. They work alongside BECOME to assess the effectiveness of implemented solutions, identify improvements, and help sustain initiatives. Their insights generate valuable learning that can be replicated in other communities.

## What We're Doing Next: Innovation in Auburn Gresham

Over the past two years, BECOME has deeply invested in Auburn Gresham, engaging over 400 community residents, advocates, and leaders through interviews, focus groups, and community gatherings. These conversations uncovered Auburn Gresham's core priorities: strengthening the local economy, creating environments where youth can thrive, improving neighborhood safety.

The next step in Auburn Gresham's transformation is launching three community-driven Innovation Groups focused on these priorities:

1. **Strengthening the Local Economy:** We'll build a thriving, self-sustained neighborhood economy by fostering entrepreneurship and creating job opportunities that match Auburn Gresham residents' talents and aspirations. Building on the momentum of local businesses, we'll inspire new homegrown enterprises for financial stability and long-term growth.
2. **Building Youth Leadership and Success:** We'll create a supportive community for youth, providing the social, cultural, and structural resources they need to thrive. Focusing on mentorship, education, and leadership development, we'll equip the next generation to become changemakers.
3. **Creating Community-led Safety Solutions:** Residents will co-create safety and care systems that reduce reliance on police, emphasizing mutual support and conflict resolution. This approach fosters trust, with community members looking out for one another and working together to keep their streets safe.

## **Short-term and Long-term Impact**

**Short-term Impact:** Within a year, the Innovation Groups will yield tangible results. We will see increased community engagement, as residents actively create and implement action plans. Early initiatives such as economic collaborations, youth leadership opportunities, and community safety workshops will create immediate benefits.

**Long-term Impact:** Our long-term vision for Auburn Gresham is to create a community where every resident can flourish. Through the sustained efforts of the Innovation Groups, Auburn Gresham will become a bastion of education, safety, and economic prosperity where residents take a sense of ownership and pride in their neighborhood.

## **Transformation Beyond Auburn Gresham**

Our vision doesn't stop at Auburn Gresham. By creating a model that can be replicated in other underserved neighborhoods, we aim to spark widespread community transformation. The skills and experiences residents gain through our process equip them to initiate effective change in various contexts—whether on their own block, throughout their neighborhood, within organizations, or at systemic levels. Auburn Gresham's success will inspire similar transformations in communities across the country and beyond.



# COMMUNITY IMPACT



## Auburn Gresham

Developed a model for youth development programs. We researched, engaged parents, staff members, and evidence-based practices and collectively created a new program theory for them!



### Outcomes

- Stronger youth leadership council focusing on violence prevention
- Development of a child leadership council who put on a community talent show
- Parent Leadership Council

## Back of the Yards

Focused on ending violence and creating a safe community for their young people. Some people had to drive an hour away to take their kids to a chess club in an area where they felt safe. We equipped 20 parents with data and leadership skills for advocacy.

### Outcomes

- Parents collected 1,422 surveys and reported on the data to demonstrate the need and advocate for more resources.
- They went on to apply that same proof of concept to their neighborhood involving housing access.



## Englewood

Catalyzed collective power for enhancing residents' quality of life. This community suffered from the ramifications of structural oppression, facing health, security, economic, and education disparities



### Outcomes

- Rallied local residents, equipping them with leadership skills to lead the change they wanted to see in their own neighborhood.
- Catalyzed community members to use voice, power, and skills to see a collective impact around violence prevention, education, and more.

## Testimonials

Our work has touched thousands of people in various ways. We have conducted research, evaluation, and training for community residents around how to positively impact their lives and their communities. Here are their testimonials:

“Dr. McBride [Founder and CEO of BECOME] has shared invaluable information that has assisted me through so many stages in my life. Overstanding how we all evolve and produce beyond the racial equity issues while introducing culturally sensitive evaluations, data, and real advocacy. My sons are young adult African American males who have also learned from Dr. McBride. We are all grateful and thank you so much Doc!

- Afrika Porter

“I have searched for spaces and platforms where I could [find] fellowship with like-minded people dedicated to uplifting the voices and experiences of those that have struggled with that challenge. Participating [in BECOME's Community Evaluation Innovation Lab] has given me a glimpse into not just the individuals in a neighborhood, but a collective of community members fighting towards articulation.”

- Raphael

“Grant funded projects with BECOME's CRCT are an opportunity for speaking truth to power. Trust the folks who are closest to the challenge or the problem to say, “Here's what's really going on...” This CRCT process allows community voices to be heard. Those are the emerging ways to change whatever barriers or challenges are happening. Trust people to know what they need; hear their processes. To me, that shares power and that starts to decolonize funding. Instead of saying, “Here's what you need. I have all the



wealth and so I know what projects are best for this community, and that's the way I want to go about funding," just trust the communities you're helping to tell you what they need."

- Fakelia

## **Be Part of Auburn Gresham's Transformation**

Auburn Gresham is ready for its next chapter of growth and prosperity. This winter, we're launching community-led innovation groups to

create lasting change. To drive this transformative work forward in 2025, we're raising \$400,000. With your partnership, we'll secure meeting spaces, strengthen community outreach and engagement through effective marketing and incentives, and provide the resources needed to equip residents in shaping their community's future. Together, we can help Auburn Gresham become a thriving, self-sustained community that inspires change far beyond its borders.

Join us today. To support this vision, please contact Dr. Dominica McBride, Founder and CEO at [dmcbride@becomecenter.org](mailto:dmcbride@becomecenter.org).