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Breaking cycles of generational poverty — one job at a time

How Project QUEST uses powerful data to raise more and serve more San Antonians

Project QUEST

BACKGROUND

Rhiannon was 30 years old, back in her childhood bedroom, sleeping next to her own newborn infant's crib. She felt lost.

"It wasn't pushed on me to find a career or make something of myself," she says. But now Rhiannon knew something would have to change: She was a mother and she didn't want her child to struggle in life. Rhiannon began researching careers and figuring out how to enter the professional world as a new parent over 30.

That's when she discovered Project QUEST, a San Antonio-based nonprofit that connects local residents to emerging careers in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. Project QUEST's programs have helped more than 12,000 people in its 32-year history. Rhiannon loved the organization's mission and, after further research, she set her sights on becoming a nurse.

It's a goal she quickly accomplished, thanks to guidance and support from Project QUEST's program. Today, Rhiannon has completed her associate degree, her bachelor's degree, and most recently, her master's degree.

Rhiannon, a Project QUEST graduate, with her daughter

Project QUEST's impact at a glance

12,000+
participants served since 1992

2x
participants served since COVID-19

1,316
job placements 2020-23

$22.15
average hourly wage (after graduation)

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> " I didn't have a lot of support from other adults when I was growing up. There were certain programs and certain people that stepped in later in my life and helped me navigate things like how to apply to college and how to approach financial aid."
>
> —Naomi Mandujano,
> planning analyst at Project QUEST

CHALLENGE

Finding the right support

Naomi Mandujano, workforce planning analyst at Project QUEST, understands Rhiannon's situation intimately. "I didn't have a lot of support from other adults when I was growing up," Naomi says. "There were certain programs and certain people that stepped in later in my life and helped me navigate things like how to apply to college and how to approach financial aid. It was difficult — no one talked about it growing up." The metrics and data visualization she produces at Project QUEST now play a crucial role in telling the story of success of countless others.

That's part of what drives Project QUEST and staff members like Naomi: the opportunity to give life-changing support to other San Antonians aspiring to be the first in their family to go to college. Many, like Rhiannon, need more than academic counseling or workforce training — they require a skilled and passionate person to help them navigate the educational process and other life obstacles. In addition, Project QUEST's nationally recognized wraparound model provides assistance with rent and childcare, money for tuition and books, as well as job interview training.
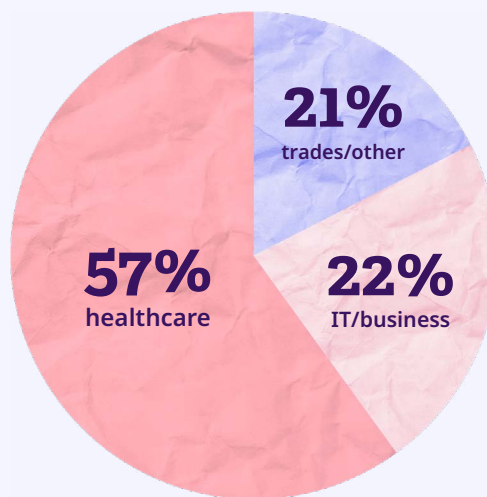

Project QUEST headquarters in Southwest San Antonio

"My parents didn't know how to help me get through college. Project QUEST was like that parent," Rhiannon says. "[They] walked me through the whole process of being in nursing school, taking the tests, passing the tests, and then getting my nursing license."

To help even more people like Rhiannon — and to secure the funding they need by demonstrating their impact more effectively — the directors at Project QUEST knew they had to operate even more efficiently, moving their case data from filing cabinets and floppy disks to powerful software like Bonterra Apricot.

Career tracks enabled by Project QUEST

21%
trades/other

57%
healthcare

22%
IT/business

With a 90% completion rate, Project QUEST's program trains on the most in-demand industries and prepares the next generation of leaders in three emerging fields.

Better data leads to better funding

At Project QUEST, it's not just the day-to-day intake and operations that are improved by Apricot: It's also demonstrating Project QUEST's overall impact to potential grantmakers willing to fund community causes.
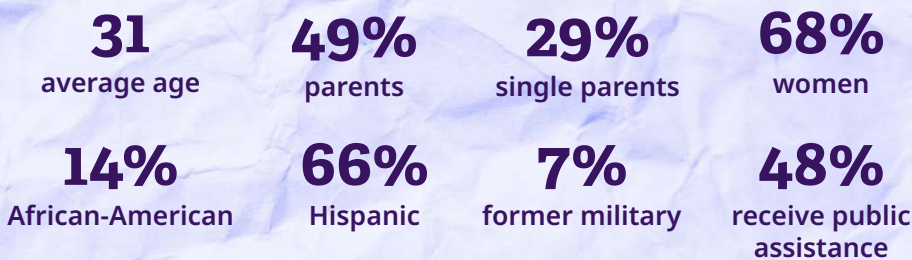
"[A funder] might say to us, 'We only work with individuals who are under 24 years of age, who are parents, and who want to go into a specific career track,'" says Francisco Martinez, president and CEO at Project QUEST. Before, finding data to share back with these local and national funders was an arduous manual process that could take weeks or more. Today, a quick search in Apricot gives them everything they need to have these conversations in real time.

The Project QUEST team with San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg

"I'm able to come back to the funder and say, 'I understand your priorities, and I can build a program to meet your goals: Twenty-seven percent of our participants are single parents currently enrolled in registered nurse programs, which is about 850 parents and represents 924 children, for example,'" Francisco says. "We can also show the generational impact."

"Apricot has been a game-changer for us," says Francisco.

Project QUEST participants, by the numbers

31
average age

49%
parents

29%
single parents

68%
women

14%
African-American

66%
Hispanic

7%
former military

48%
receive public assistance

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IMPACT

A model for success

In partnership with Bonterra, Project QUEST has not only raised more money by better demonstrating their overall impact, but they now use data in every decision they make — from their offerings and services strategy to the most effective way to grow the nonprofit and reach their impact goals.

In 2023, Project QUEST was honored by the Bonterra Impact Awards, winning the data-driven enthusiast award for creating a culture centered on using data to create more impact.

$14,711
Average pre-Project QUEST salary

208%
annual earnings increase

$45,257
Average post-Project QUEST salary

Project QUEST's results speak for themselves: Ninety percent of their participants graduate. Their graduates earn much more than their peers just a decade after completing the program. And their salaries — which average just $14,711 pre-program — grow by 208% to $45,257 after graduation.

The model is catching on. A professor at M.I.T. Sloan School of Management says, "There's no reason every city and town in America can't have something like it." Across cities in Texas, Louisiana, Iowa, and Arizona — and even as far away as the United Kingdom — new nonprofits are being modeled after Project QUEST.

Breaking the generational cycle

At Project QUEST, impact extends beyond individuals: It breaks seemingly unbreakable patterns, setting future generations up for success.

Rhiannon puts it best: "Project QUEST has given me the ability to not struggle. In turn, my child does not know what it's like to struggle."

It's the perfect example of how great people — armed with the right data — can change lives forever.

At Bonterra, we champion the doers with software that enables the greatest good. Learn more about Apricot here.

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