

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



# RESILIENCE

REBECCA GOULD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Nebraska Appleseed has always held close the ideas of accepting that change is a part of life, to always move towards our goals, and take decisive action where and when possible. These are also the traits of you, our supporters, continuously providing inspiration and strength year after year — reminding us that even in the face of tough times, there's so much possibility.

Our communities were resilient in 2021, facing many challenges and finding ways to solve them together. Collectively we: passed historic increases in eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child care subsidies, and heating assistance; built momentum with meatpacking workers and allies for long-term change during the pandemic by creating substantial awareness of dangerous conditions; trained meatpacking employees in workers' rights and safety statewide; and continued to strengthen tenants' rights through legislation.

Social movements can be long and slow, but by working collectively we can bring about great moments of large-scale change like Medicaid expansion. After 10 years of intentional advocacy including legislation, a ballot initiative, and successful legal advocacy halting the two-tiered Medicaid expansion benefits system, today more than 60,000 people have access to health care.

Each year we reflect on the fights that have joyfully crossed the finish line, ruminate on issues left unfinished, and look ahead to what's needed to move toward justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans.

Our collective resilience and persistence in 2021 touched so many lives, proving that good things can happen in the face of big challenges. But we must remember, a major part of resilience is taking care of ourselves and the people around us. Advocacy is never on just one person. It's everyone doing a little piece when they can on any given day. Together, our efforts add up to so much.

Thank you for taking care of us, this important work, and for continuing to be a part of it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Gould". The signature is fluid and cursive, located on the left side of the page.

**"...even in  
the face of tough times,  
there's so much possibility."**

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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JOHN SMOLSKY, **TREASURER**

ARTHUR I. ZYGIELBAUM, **PRESIDENT-ELECT**  
JOSH BARTEE, **SECRETARY**

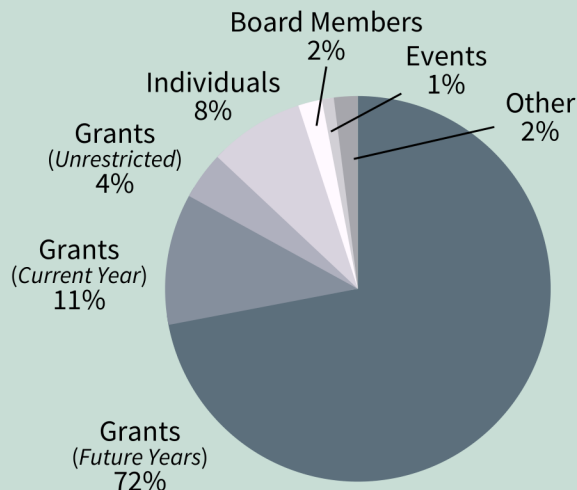
MICHAEL BERRY  
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BEATTY BRASCH  
STUART CHITTENDEN  
TIMOTHY L. CHRISTIAN  
TIM CUDDIGAN

ROGER GONZALES  
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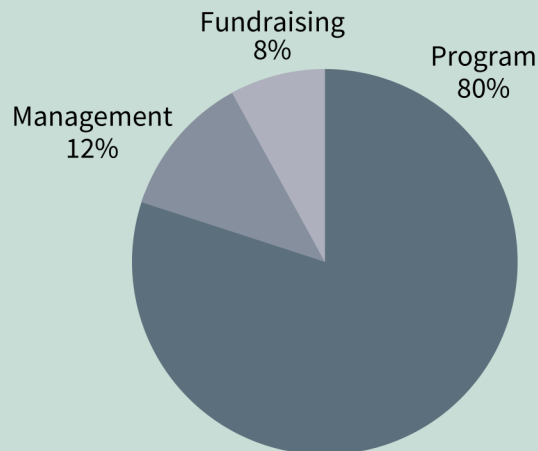
RANDALL MOODY  
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DANELLE SMITH  
MEGAN WRIGHT  
PATRICIA ZIEG

## 2021 Financial Summary

### REVENUE



### EXPENSES



Annual financial audits and Form 990 tax returns can be viewed online at  
[neappleseed.org/financials](https://neappleseed.org/financials).

# ADVOCACY TOOLS

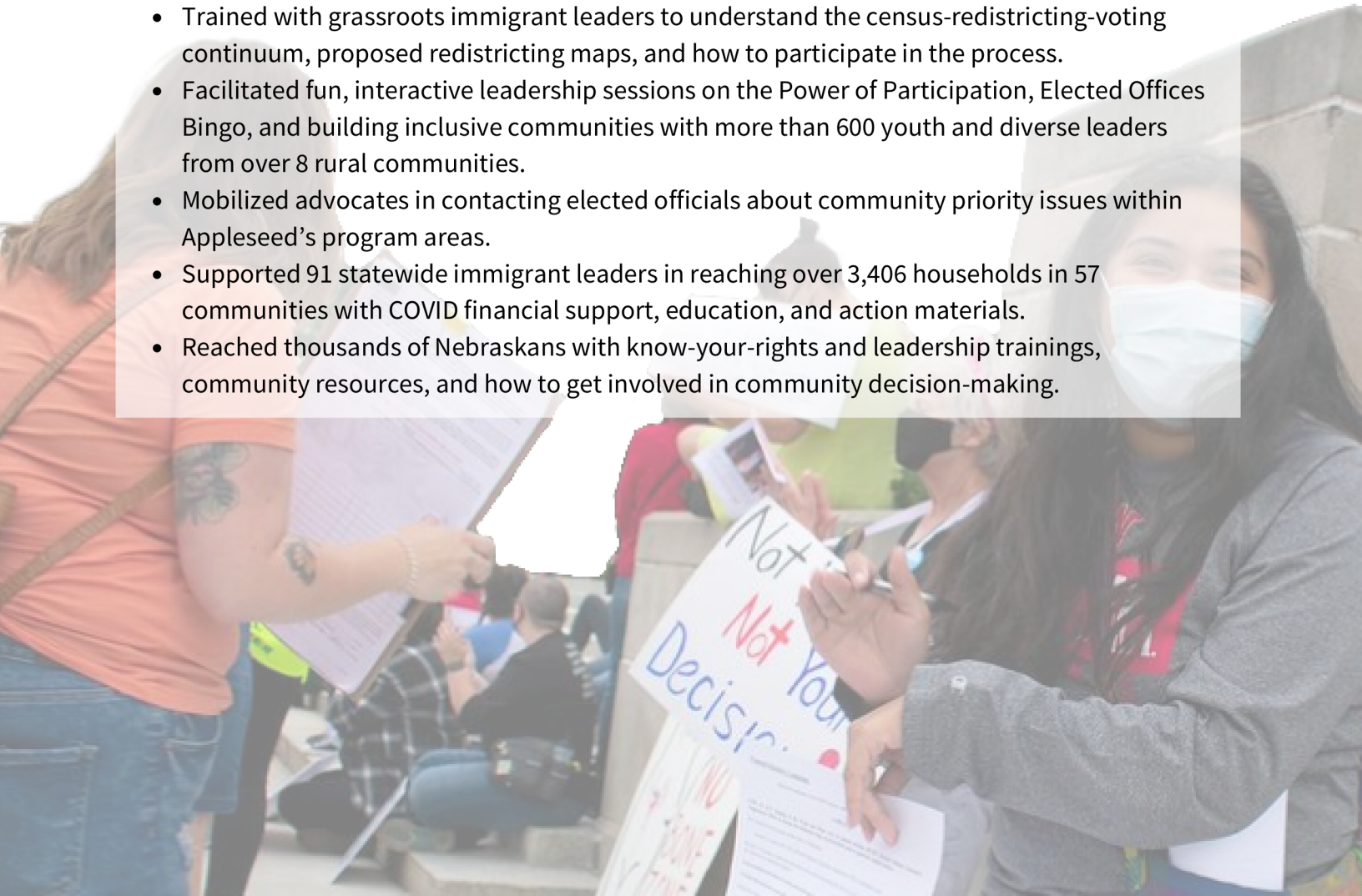
Nebraska Appleseed uses multiple tools and strategies simultaneously to fight for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. We use the following strategies to fight for economic justice, health care access, children's welfare, and immigrant inclusion to create a just, vibrant, and inclusive community where everyone can thrive.

## Community Organizing

Community organizing is at the heart of Appleseed's advocacy tools and strategies, whether supporting community leadership or collecting petition signatures. Organizing engages and empowers directly-affected Nebraskans to build community-based change.

While the pandemic created many challenges for in-person community organizing, Appleseed adjusted and stayed connected with the community. In 2021, our team of organizers:

- Supported local grassroots partners led by immigrants and leaders of color through power-building and organizational capacity support with peer learning, technical assistance, and collaborative fundraising.
- Trained with grassroots immigrant leaders to understand the census-redistricting-voting continuum, proposed redistricting maps, and how to participate in the process.
- Facilitated fun, interactive leadership sessions on the Power of Participation, Elected Offices Bingo, and building inclusive communities with more than 600 youth and diverse leaders from over 8 rural communities.
- Mobilized advocates in contacting elected officials about community priority issues within Appleseed's program areas.
- Supported 91 statewide immigrant leaders in reaching over 3,406 households in 57 communities with COVID financial support, education, and action materials.
- Reached thousands of Nebraskans with know-your-rights and leadership trainings, community resources, and how to get involved in community decision-making.



# Legislation

Appleaseed conducts legislative advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to advance justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans.

At the state level, Appleaseed saw four big priorities pass and become law:

- **LB108** expanded access to the SNAP program by reducing the “cliff effect,” which occurs when families utilizing SNAP must forgo raises or better jobs or lose more benefits than they would gain in pay.
- **LB306** expanded eligibility for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a critical tool to help with the heating, cooling, and energy needs of vulnerable households statewide.
- **LB485** made a long-needed expansion of initial eligibility for the child care subsidy program to allow families whose income is at or under 185% of the federal poverty level to receive and maintain the subsidy if their income stays below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- **LB320** updated Nebraska’s Landlord-Tenant Act to address Nebraska’s housing needs and provide tenants better access to justice and housing stability.

## 2021 Nebraska Legislative Season

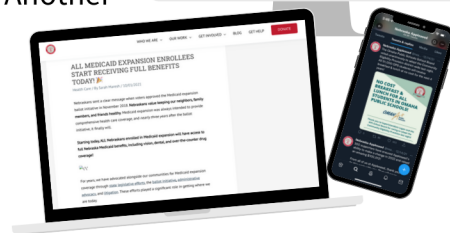
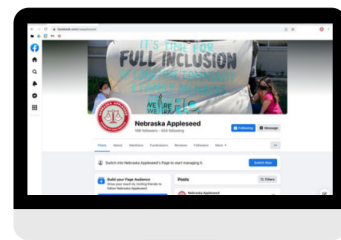


- **Testified or took a position on 53 bills.**
- **4 big priorities passed.**
- **Helped introduce 2 interim studies.**
- **Testified at 5 interim study hearings.**

Federal advocacy in 2021 included pushing for the Build Back Better plan and COVID-19 relief through the passing of The American Rescue Plan. Our team met with Nebraska’s federal representatives to discuss food security policy, positive federal immigration laws, worker safety in meat and poultry processing, health care access, and more. Appleaseed submitted 5 public comments as part of our federal administrative advocacy on issues regarding immigrants’ access to public benefits, surprise health care billing, DACA, opportunities to prevent injury in meat processing work and a SNAP policy.

# Communications

Effective advocacy requires strong communications to inform and mobilize people to act. Appleaseed uses a variety of channels to connect Nebraskans to advocacy information and action — from conveying state and federal legislative happenings, to connecting the public with elected officials to make their voices heard on pressing issues. Another focus in our communications advocacy is to lift up the voices and lived experiences of Nebraskans and amplify their voices to change the narrative about the issues we are fighting for.



# Legal Advocacy

Appleaseed defends people’s rights and ensures that laws and policies serve people’s needs through administrative advocacy, litigation, filing amicus briefs, and providing attorneys technical support, and more. Issues we pursued in 2021 included:

- **Economic Justice** - Represented a client erroneously charged over \$25,000 by DHHS in alleged SNAP overpayments. We proved that they did not owe DHHS any money and determined that due to DHHS error the client was actually entitled to nearly \$4,000 in underpaid benefits.
- **Child Welfare** - Continued our case challenging the constitutionality of privatized child welfare case management services in Douglas and Sarpy Counties, which hold almost half of Nebraska's child welfare cases. Privatization has subjected youth and families to over a decade of unstable case management practices, including under Saint Francis Ministries' care, resulting in the Legislature's decision to officially end privatization in 2022.
- **Health Care** - Filed and concluded a lawsuit challenging DHHS’s unlawful restrictions on people enrolling in Medicaid expansion, including tying unlawful work requirements to access dental, vision, and over the counter medication benefits. As a result of our litigation, as many as 123,000 Nebraskans can benefit from access to these critical services that they would not have been able to access otherwise.
- **Collective Impact Lincoln** - Co-counseled with Legal Aid of Nebraska to represent a client in raising the issue of whether people are entitled to a jury trial when facing eviction. Last year during the pandemic, there were at least 3,400 evictions across Nebraska that could have been impacted by this case.

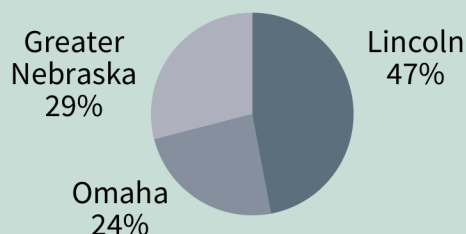


# Community Assistance Line

The Community Assistance Line helps fill major gaps in Nebraska's legal and public benefit systems by providing legal information, personalized referrals, and guidance on how to navigate complex public benefit systems to low-income and underserved community members. It also helps identify and monitor broad systemic and policy issues harming Nebraskans, which help us work with community members, partners, and service providers to solve these issues at their roots. We utilize the information gathered through the Community Assistance Line to shed light on various issues, better coordinate with partners for direct assistance, and educate decision-makers about these issues and community members' lived experiences.

Some of the major issues heard from the community in 2021 included people facing debt collections because of the state's calculation errors, the state's early termination of pandemic unemployment insurance, families facing hunger and food insecurity, and individuals at risk of being evicted who need emergency rental assistance.

## 355 Total Households Served in 2021



# Coalition Building

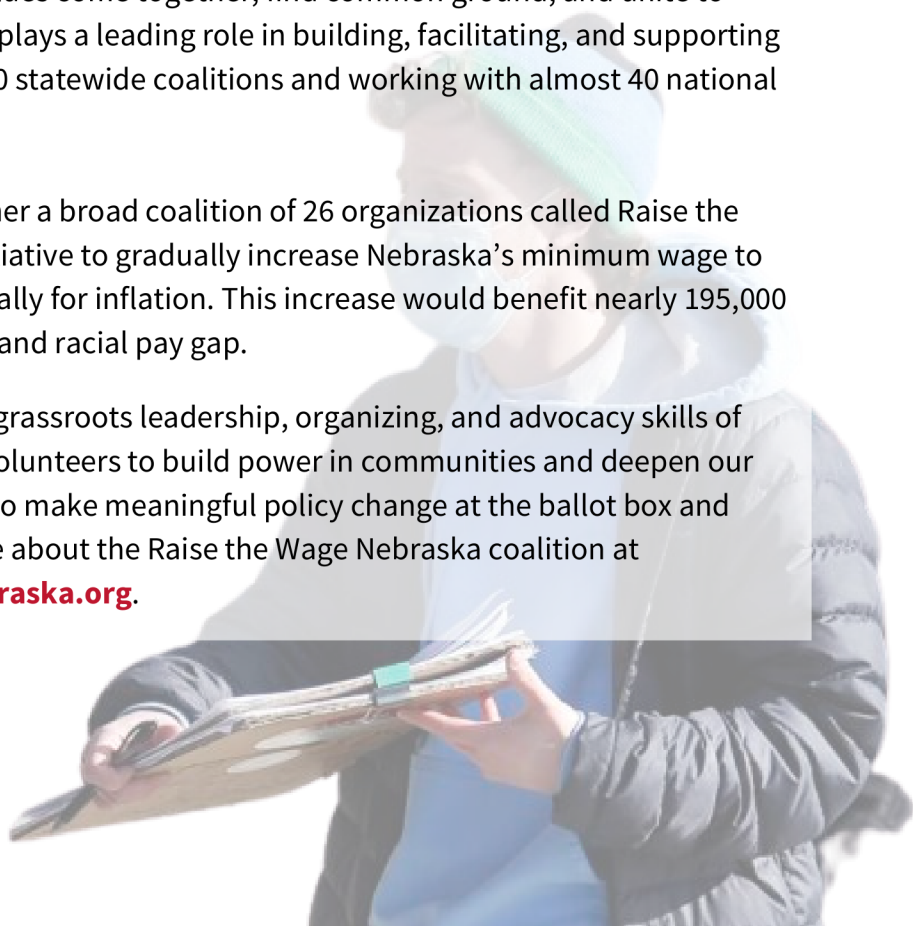
None of our efforts are done alone — advocacy is more powerful when organizations, individuals, and community groups with shared values come together, find common ground, and unite to create long-lasting change. Appleseed plays a leading role in building, facilitating, and supporting coalitions as a member of more than 10 statewide coalitions and working with almost 40 national and local networks and partners.

In 2021, Appleseed helped bring together a broad coalition of 26 organizations called Raise the Wage Nebraska to advance a ballot initiative to gradually increase Nebraska's minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2026 and adjust it annually for inflation. This increase would benefit nearly 195,000 Nebraskans and help close the gender and racial pay gap.



We aim to invest in grassroots leadership, organizing, and advocacy skills of our members and volunteers to build power in communities and deepen our collective capacity to make meaningful policy change at the ballot box and beyond. Learn more about the Raise the Wage Nebraska coalition at

[RaiseTheWageNebraska.org](https://www.RaiseTheWageNebraska.org).

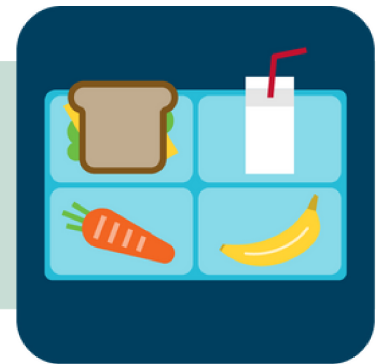


# ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Appleseed's economic justice work strives to create a foundation of dignity and support for Nebraskans in need by addressing systemic inequities. We saw progress in housing, food security, and wages in 2021.

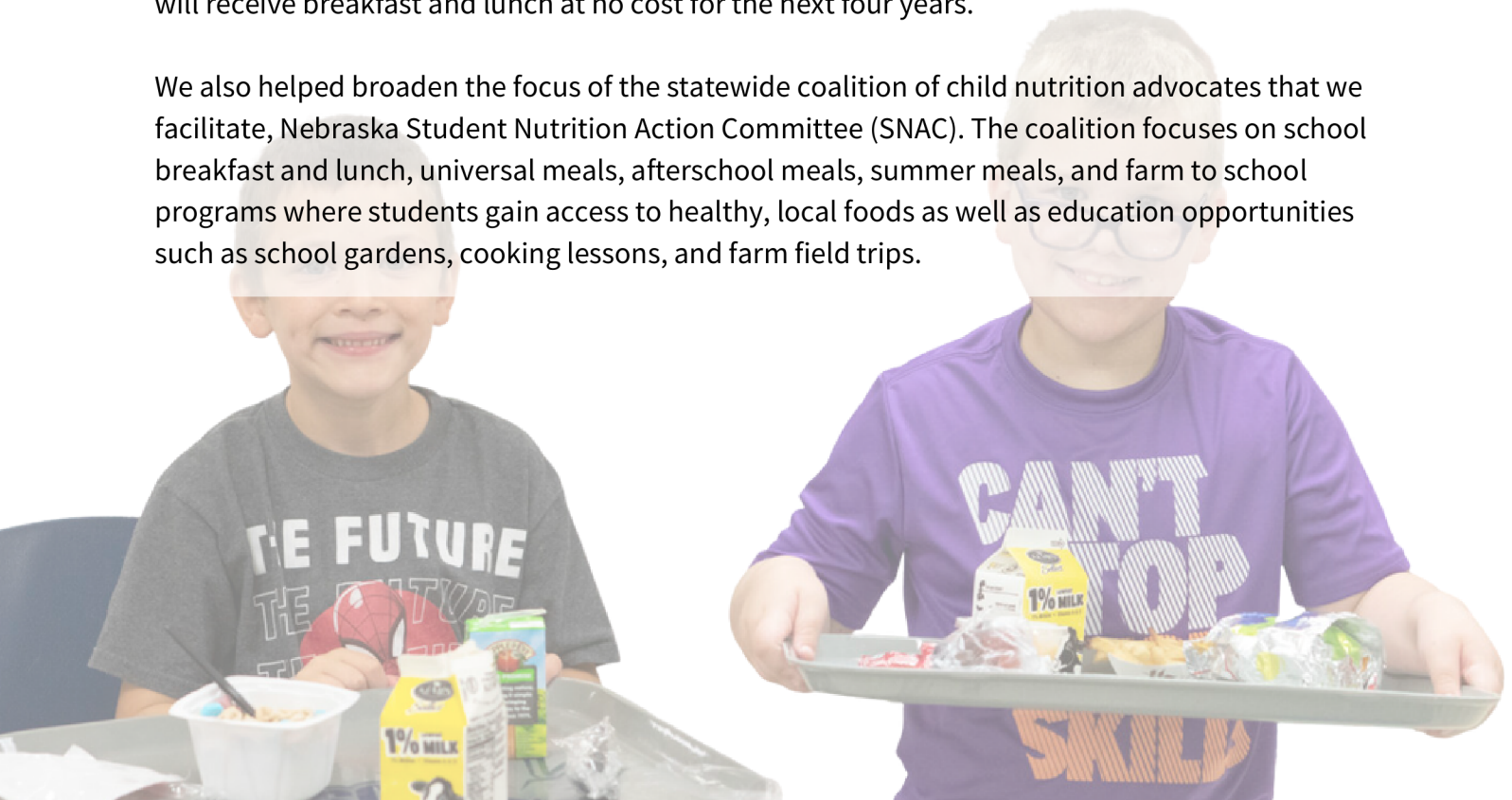
To address housing issues and tenant rights, Appleseed helped pass state-level legislation (LB320) to promote fair rental practices, improve transparency in the eviction process, and protect victims of domestic violence. Appleseed engaged with community members on the harmful issues of evictions alongside our partners Civic Nebraska and the Tenant Assistance Project — a collaboration with the City of Lincoln, the University of Nebraska College of Law, and nonprofit legal partners providing representation to those facing eviction during the pandemic.

**No cost breakfast & lunch  
for all 52,000+ students in  
Omaha Public Schools!**



Our food and nutrition access program saw major victories in 2021. After seven years of advocacy from Appleseed and partners, the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Community Eligibility Provision district-wide — meaning all 52,000+ OPS students will receive breakfast and lunch at no cost for the next four years.

We also helped broaden the focus of the statewide coalition of child nutrition advocates that we facilitate, Nebraska Student Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC). The coalition focuses on school breakfast and lunch, universal meals, afterschool meals, summer meals, and farm to school programs where students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips.





# HEALTH CARE

Medicaid is a vital program that provides much-needed health care to Nebraskans. Appleseed filed a lawsuit challenging the State of Nebraska's unlawful tiered benefits system that would have denied thousands of Nebraskans access to needed dental, vision, and over-the-counter drug coverage. The state has since ended the tiered benefit system and all Medicaid expansion enrollees have access to these critical benefits as of October 1, 2021.

Medicaid expansion benefits provide significant opportunity to address long-standing health equity issues and coverage for people who have been unserved and underserved for years. This includes Nebraskans of color, individuals with chronic medical conditions who are not eligible for disability but have high medical needs, older Nebraskans who are not yet eligible for Medicare but are unable to access employer insurance, and rural Nebraskans who live in areas with fewer employer-based coverage options and free or sliding scale clinics.

Appleseed continued to get the word out to communities about Medicaid enrollment and how Medicaid can address health disparities. Our 2021 media campaign reached tens of thousands of Nebraskans with information in both English and Spanish on how to enroll.

The COVID-19 vaccines that first became publicly available in early 2021 were an important part of the pandemic response. Appleseed disseminated information about how to access the COVID-19 vaccine to keep themselves and their communities healthy.

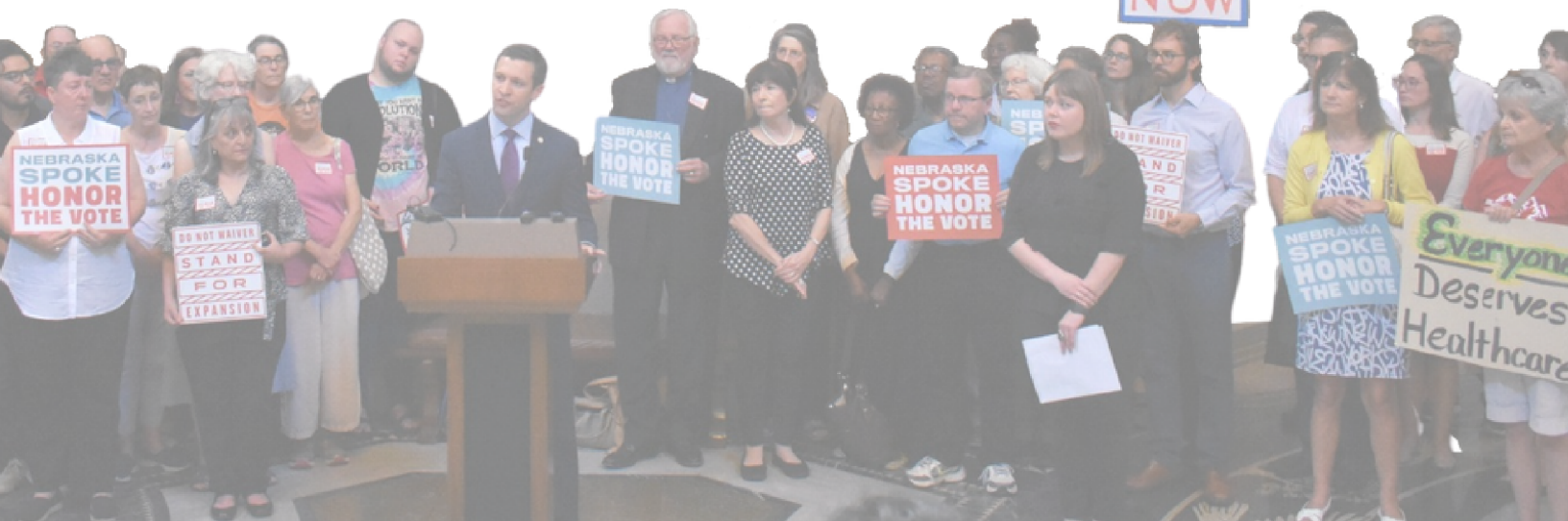
## 2021

In February, Nebraska Appleseed filed a lawsuit to ensure access to full benefits in Medicaid expansion.

In June, the state announced that it was ending its tiered benefit system and did so starting October 1st.



ACT NOW



# IMMIGRANTS & COMMUNITIES

Immigrant Nebraskans are integral to the fabric of Nebraska families and communities. Together with partners statewide, our team continued important long-term work building collaborative leadership and supporting policies and practices that strengthen communities.

We joined with statewide immigrant leaders including Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status residents, undocumented Nebraskans, and diverse community partners to show strong support for positive immigration laws and full inclusion of longtime community members. We worked with local leaders to develop a powerful stories campaign demonstrating the local impact of outdated immigration laws on Nebraska families and communities — sharing videos at Stories & Action parties hosted by community groups with hundreds of Nebraskans across the state.

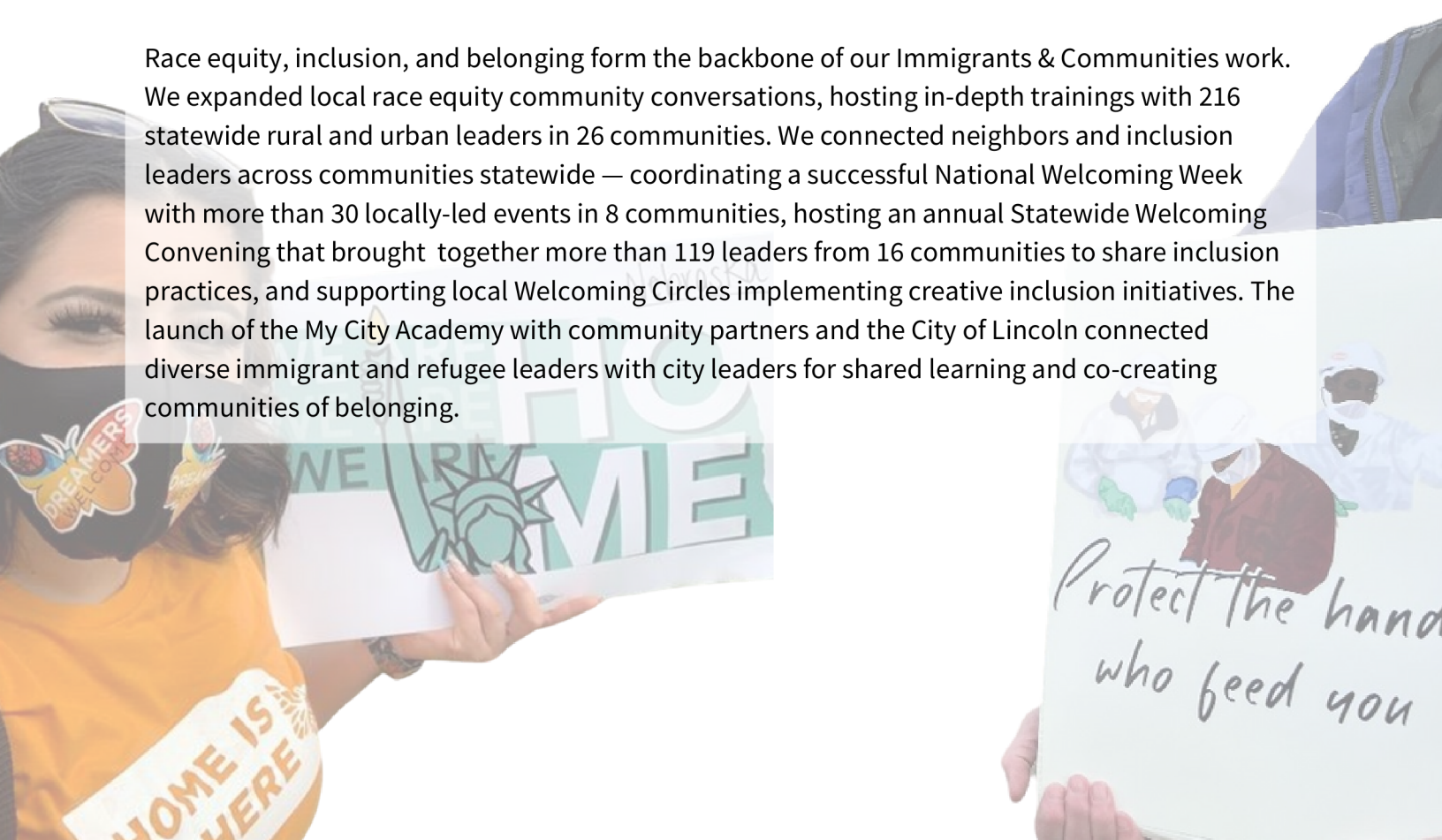
We continued to call for urgently needed worker-safety protections to address alarming injury rates in meat and poultry plants, and support Nebraskans injured on the job. Alongside worker leaders and diverse statewide partners, we provided know-your-rights training while supporting community members in presenting experiences and legislative proposals to state senators, federal officials, media, and the public.



**Meatpacking  
Rights and  
Safety**

**640 Workers Trained  
Statewide in 13 Communities**

Race equity, inclusion, and belonging form the backbone of our Immigrants & Communities work. We expanded local race equity community conversations, hosting in-depth trainings with 216 statewide rural and urban leaders in 26 communities. We connected neighbors and inclusion leaders across communities statewide — coordinating a successful National Welcoming Week with more than 30 locally-led events in 8 communities, hosting an annual Statewide Welcoming Convening that brought together more than 119 leaders from 16 communities to share inclusion practices, and supporting local Welcoming Circles implementing creative inclusion initiatives. The launch of the My City Academy with community partners and the City of Lincoln connected diverse immigrant and refugee leaders with city leaders for shared learning and co-creating communities of belonging.



# CHILD WELFARE

Appleseed works to reform the state's broken child welfare system and ensure that children have the support they need to reach their fullest potential.

Our Child Welfare team worked to identify and advance solutions to prevent the State taking foster youth's Social Security income to reimburse itself. Our team found that Nebraska screens youth for potential Social Security benefit eligibility, applies on their behalf, receives the payments, and uses the money to pay for kids' care despite existing funding that pays for those services — affecting about 350 youth every month. The majority of youth are not notified of their eligibility or that the State has applied and is receiving these benefits on their behalf.

Appleseed alerted hundreds of child welfare attorneys across Nebraska through our Legal Resource Center and held training sessions with approximately 35 attorneys to educate them on how relevant laws may impact clients. We worked closely with Senator Megan Hunt on a legislative interim study investigating Nebraska's current practices and helped draft legislation that will add more formalized procedures and protections for youth beneficiaries.

At the end of 2021, Appleseed partnered with Voices of Children and hosted two Child Welfare Listening Sessions focused on race and equity issues. These virtual listening sessions gave youth, families, and professionals the opportunity to make their voice heard on recommendations to better Nebraska's child welfare system. Our team is grateful for the information discussed and plans to continue additional sessions in 2022.



## Foster Care Reform Legal Resource Center

In 2021, we assisted attorneys practicing in juvenile courts to enforce the legal rights of children and families in the child welfare system by:

- Direct assistance to 17 attorneys who reached out for guidance in their cases.
- Engaging a listserv of 350+ attorneys by distributing resources and updates on new and emerging issues, policy, and case law.
- Hosting 3 free webinars on COVID-19 pandemic benefits for youth in care, extended foster care rights, and the ethical responsibilities of juvenile court attorneys.

# APPLESEED STAFF

AS OF MAY 2022

**DIANE AMDOR** STAFF ATTORNEY (EJ)  
**KELSEY ARENDS** STAFF ATTORNEY (HCA)  
**BECCA BRUNE** FEDERAL POLICY DIRECTOR  
**MAGDALENA CAZAREZ** COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR  
**ALLISON DERR** STAFF ATTORNEY (CW)  
**DREW DUNCAN** DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE  
**ANDREW FARIAS** WEITZ FELLOW  
**CÉSAR GARCÍA** COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (IC)  
**JAMES GODDARD** PROGRAMS SR. DIRECTOR  
**BECKY GOULD** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**NICK GRANDGENETT** STAFF ATTORNEY (IC)  
**MEGAN HAMANN** COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (EJ)  
**SARAH HELVEY** PROGRAM DIRECTOR (CW)  
**LISA HOLMQUIST** EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT  
**KRISTINE HULL** ADMINISTRATION SR. DIRECTOR  
**VIC KLAFTER** CAMPAIGNS ORGANIZER  
**LINDSAY LIMBACH** ORGANIZING DIRECTOR  
**SARAH MARESH** PROGRAM DIRECTOR (HCA)  
**SELINA MARTINEZ** FIELD DIRECTOR - CAMPAIGNS  
**VANESSA MARTINEZ** ORGANIZING MANAGER (IC)  
**ROBERT MCEWEN** LEGAL DIRECTOR  
**RUBY MÉNDEZ LÓPEZ** COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (IC)  
**KHENDA MUSTAFA** WELCOMING COORDINATOR (IC)  
**KAYLEIGH NEWMAN** SR. GRANTS COORDINATOR  
**KASEY OGLE** STAFF ATTORNEY (CIL)  
**KATIE PITTS** STATE POLICY DIRECTOR  
**ERIN PIXLEY** SR. PROGRAM ASSOCIATE  
**DIANE ROLFSMEYER** FINANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR  
**GLORIA SARMIENTO** SR. COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (IC)  
**ERIC SAVAIANO** PROGRAM MANAGER (EJ) FOOD & NUTRITION ACCESS  
**KEN SMITH** PROGRAM DIRECTOR (EJ)  
**NIC SWIERCEK** DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT SR. DIRECTOR  
**MIKA TAKAMORI** COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE  
**TRISHA THOMPSON** SR. INTAKE COORDINATOR  
**DARCY TROMANHAUSER** PROGRAM DIRECTOR (IC)  
**LIZZIE TURNER** COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (CIL)  
**RÓMULO VEGA** COMMUNITY ORGANIZER (IC)  
**SCHALISHA WALKER** PROGRAM COORDINATOR (CW)  
**ERIC WICKIZER** IT & DATA DIRECTOR  
**CHRISTA YOAKUM** SR. WELCOMING COORDINATOR (IC)  
**OMAID ZABIH** STRATEGY SENIOR DIRECTOR

**CW** - CHILD WELFARE **IC** - IMMIGRANTS & COMMUNITIES  
**EJ** - ECONOMIC JUSTICE **HCA** - HEALTH CARE ACCESS  
**CIL** - COLLECTIVE IMPACT LINCOLN

# THANK YOU!

Your support carries forward the fight for a **just, vibrant, and inclusive Nebraska** where everyone can thrive!



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