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24

FINAL REPORT

# SAFE AMBASSADORS PROGRAM



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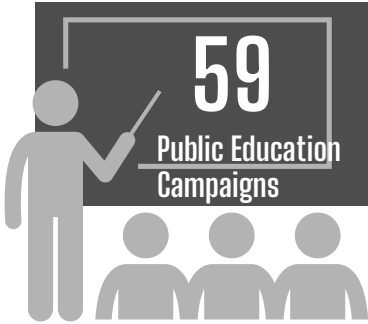
# 1. Executive Summary

The SAFE (Streets Are For Everybody) Ambassadors are the Chicago Department of Transportation's (CDOT) safety education and engagement team who support the Department in keeping outreach efforts and engagement activities culturally relevant for Chicagoans of all ages.

Throughout the years, the SAFE program has been rebranded and rebooted to be responsive to the needs of our communities, providing traffic safety education, resources, and outreach, as well as building capacity to support a wider range of CDOT projects and initiatives. Despite changes, the program continues upholding its core values and mission: to educate all Chicagoans on how to walk, bike, scoot, take public transit, and drive safely. We are proud of how the SAFE Ambassadors program has grown and are excited to continue expanding our reach and impact across the City.

This 2024 SAFE Program final report provides insights into our 23rd year of traffic safety education and engagement activities and our efforts to meet our goals.

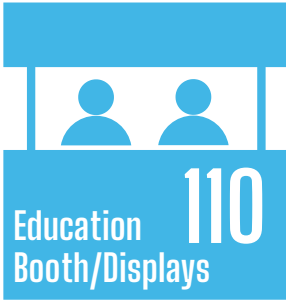
# 516 TOTAL EVENTS



**59**  
Public Education  
Campaigns



**5**  
Helmet/Bike  
Light Giveaways



Education  
Booth/Displays **110**



**37**  
Community  
Bike Rides



**103**  
Learn to Ride Classes

38 Kids Classes Facilitated

85 Kids Participated 

71 Adult Classes Facilitated

181 Adults Participated



**74**  
Engagements  
at Parks

**18**  
Junior  
Ambassadors  
Hired

86 Summer Camps Visited

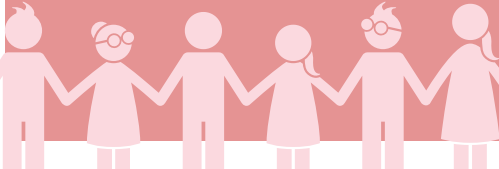
38 Kids LTR 



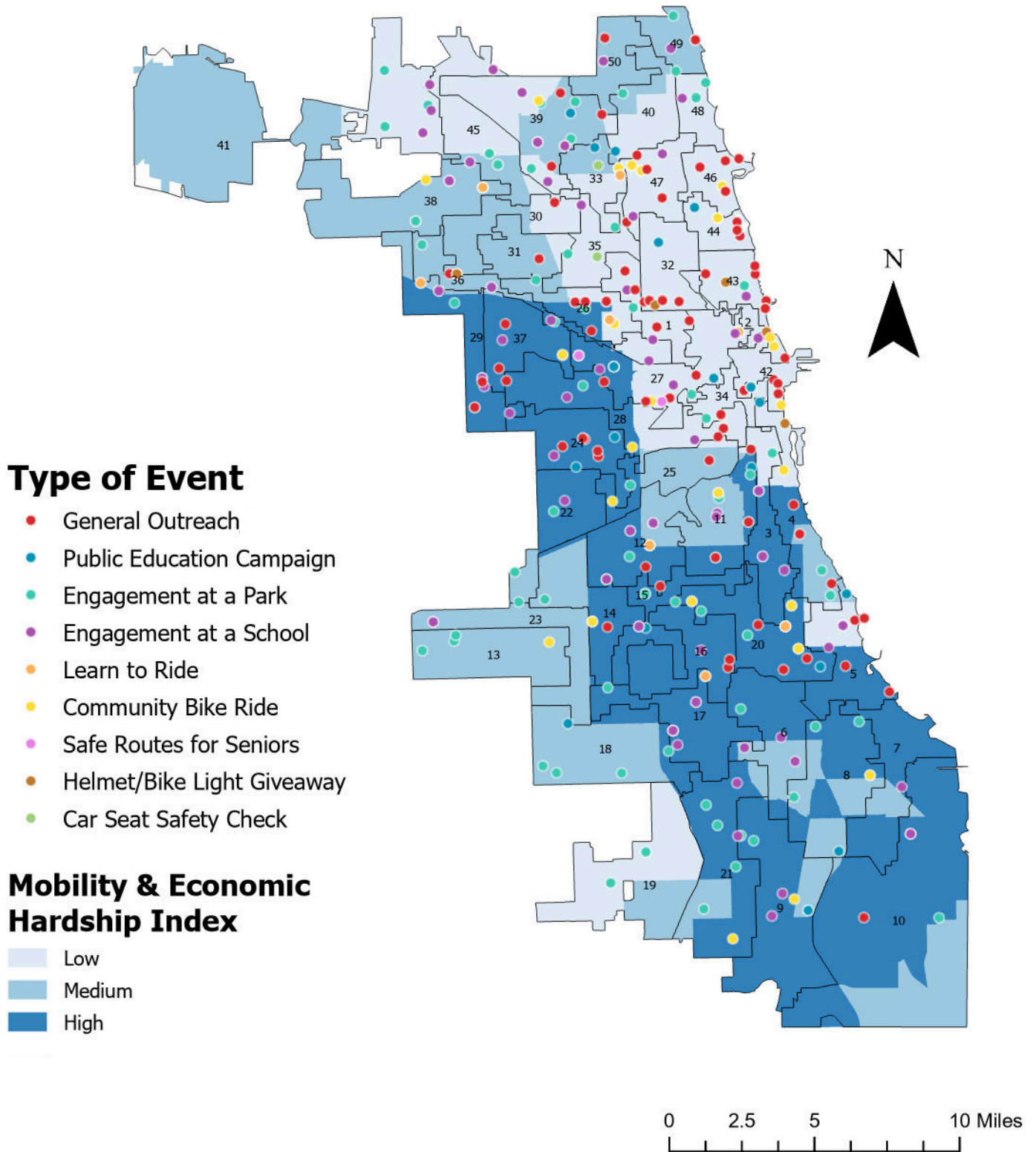
**121**  
Events  
at Schools

51 Schools Visited

244 Classrooms Visited

6,364 Students Educated 

# 2024 Events Distribution by Ward Map



## 2. Program Highlights



Chicago's SAFE Ambassadors program is dynamic, innovative, and responsive to the needs, challenges, and priorities of communities. In 2024, our team expanded its reach in already established programs and activities such as Learn to Ride (LTR), and refined our implementation strategies for new initiatives such as our annual LTR students bike ride. The following is a summary of the team's 2024 work and efforts.

# SAFE Learn to Ride

Program at a glance:

Class Level	Number of Classes	Number of Students
LTR Beginner/Refresher	44	142
Skill-builder	15	54
Road Ride	12	32

- 395 class requests came in between May and September this year
- 228 Chicagoans attended one or more of our 71 classes
- 25% of students came back after their first class for more education and support from our team.



Learn to Ride classes continue to be a popular, free, and accessible way for Chicagoans to gain or expand their bike riding abilities. Our program also boosts the frequency of experienced cyclists across the city. At the Beginner Learn to Ride level, we held 44 classes with 142 one-time students—39 of whom returned for a second class, while 10 returned for even more classes to improve their confidence and skills. This year, 67% of our students ages 13 to 76 learned to ride for the first time or after a long break in bike riding.

At the Skill-Builder level, where participants build their riding confidence and practice newly-learned skills, we led 15 classes with 54 students. Most of those students (35) started at the Beginner Learn to Ride level, and four of them took this course twice. 19 of the students already knew how to ride but were grateful to learn about our SAFE classes and the free opportunity to practice signaling, turning, and other bike-handling skills on a car-free course.





We held a dozen Road Ride classes, during which we assessed each student's riding ability inside Seward Park before cycling on the road where students can experience everyday road situations and practice key riding techniques with our team's support and encouragement. Of the 32 students at this level, 5 had worked their way to the top tier of our classes after starting at the Beginner Lear to Ride level, 6 joined our course at the Skill-Builder level, and 19 were new to the SAFE Learn to Ride program.

This year, SAFE Learn to Ride was possible because of our key partnership with the Chicago Park District and the stellar support of the supervisors and staff at Horner Park, McKinley Park, and Washington Park. We also appreciate the reliable and friendly service of the Divvy team, and a huge thank you to 811 Chicago for the generous sponsorship of new helmets for us to fit and send home with students who do not have their own.




**What's on the road ahead:** We will stretch our teaching season by debuting Beginner Learn to Ride and Skill-Builder classes in the gymnasiums of Horner and Washington parks during the winter months and will continue exploring partnerships to conduct Learn to Ride lessons year-round.

# Program Spotlight: SAFE Students Annual Bike Ride

An essential part of the SAFE program's mission is to build community and empower Chicagoans to confidently and actively ride their bikes. We understand that building a community can be difficult, and expanding our growth requires bringing more value to our students. One of our strategies for continuous communication and engagement was the implementation of a summer newsletter (distributed monthly between June and September) to inform LTR students and graduates about events and community bike rides they can join alongside our Ambassadors.

This year, we hosted our second annual group ride. This event brought together 38 LTR students (an 11.76% increase in participation from last year), both new and returning, for a six-mile ride starting from Horner Park, heading north along the North Shore Channel Trail, and then into neighborhood streets where they had first-hand experience with different cycling infrastructure.



*"I love the enthusiasm of your staff. They are friendly, passionate, and knowledgeable."*

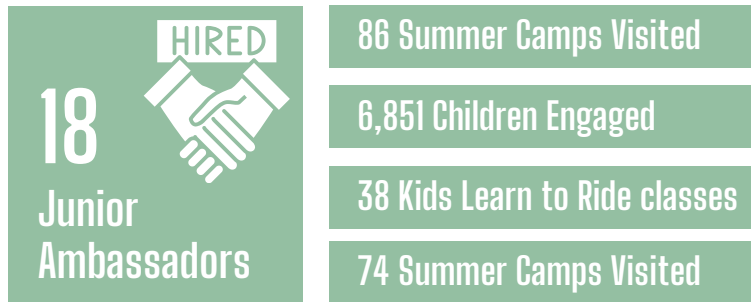
*"What I enjoyed the most about the ride was how I felt safe and confident riding in the street with a group, as well as meeting other cyclists."*

# Junior Ambassadors & Kids Learn to Ride

Junior Ambassadors program at a glance:

Program	Number of Classes	Kids Educated
Transportation Safety Education at Summer Camps	86	6,851
Kids Learn to Ride	38	85
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>6,936</b>





The Junior Ambassador program offers a distinctive peer-to-peer mentorship opportunity for young Chicagoans. The Chicago Park District hires youth recreational leaders to deliver transportation safety education (in the form of presentations and activities) at the Park District's summer camps, while our SAFE Ambassadors team trains these leaders to conduct Kids Learn to Ride classes for children ages 6-12 at various locations.

This year, our SAFE program worked with 18 Junior Ambassadors (a 33% increase of hires from the last two seasons) that served as leaders and mentors for younger children and their communities. Due to this program's success over the years and high demand, we lengthened the program from six to ten weeks. Over the course of those 10-weeks, Junior Ambassadors visited 86 parks and educated 6,851 children and teens on bicycle and pedestrian safety. Additionally, our Junior Ambassadors provided personalized helmet fittings for children and supplied helmets to those in need, made possible by the generous donation of new helmets from Lurie's Children's Hospital.

While bringing your own bike is encouraged, it is not a barrier to signing up for the class. Our staff continues to maintain and utilize a donated fleet of loaner bicycles received in 2022 through our collaboration with Working Bikes, for children who do not own a bicycle and wish to participate.



Junior Ambassadors are expected to access park locations where they facilitate Kids Learn to Ride classes by bicycle. However, bike ownership is not a requirement to become a Junior Ambassador; to support Junior Ambassadors that do not own a bicycle at the time of hire, the SAFE Program partnered with Working Bikes to provide them with a bike under the Cycle of Power initiative. This initiative provides donated bicycles to individuals in need to access affordable transportation for employment, education, and other vital resources across the city. Five of this year's Junior Ambassadors received a free bicycle through this program, empowering them to work during the summer while allowing them to keep their bicycles and adopt a lifestyle centered around active mobility.



In addition to summer camp transportation safety education programming, the Junior Ambassadors collaborated with the SAFE Ambassadors to successfully facilitate 38 Kids Learn to Ride classes (outside the Park District's summer camps), reaching 85 children and young cyclists. The program operated at 6 park locations this year to offer accessible options across the city: Portage Park, Humboldt Park, McKinley Park, Washington Park, Riis Park and Rutherford Sayre Park.

Kids Learn to Ride programming continues to be in high demand, this year we received 276 requests for classes. 14% of students returned for a second year hoping to improve their riding skills in a safe environment. Our Kids Learn to Ride initiative is a valuable free community resource that fosters independence, awareness, and confidence while creating empowering opportunities for youth mentorship and employment.

**What's on the road ahead:** Provide Skill Builder classes for kids (secondary advance class). Offer Family Learn to Ride, where all members of a family can learn to ride a bicycle together.

# Bike Chicago

The SAFE Ambassadors continued facilitating the Bike Chicago initiative throughout 2024. Similar to past years, our team was responsible for streamlining the distribution process, from consolidating the pre-distribution online education, increasing the number of bikes distributed at events, to improving communications with applicants and recipients via email, text, and a new online form.



A total of 1,272 bikes were distributed from October 2023 to September 2024, a 38% increase from 2023. Additionally, the Bike Chicago program received significant media attention locally and nationally, with reports from the [Shared Use Mobility Center \(SUMC\)](#), [Chicago Sun-Times](#), [MacArthur Foundation](#), [Streetsblog Chicago](#), praising the bike giveaways and SUMC noted that the Ambassadors' work, including Learn to Ride classes, "is helping bridge divides and advocate for inclusive access to bikes across the city."

This year, the Ambassadors conducted 27 educational Zoom calls, where 986 total attendees (a 23% increase of the number of individuals educated last year) received introductory education on transportation, specifically cycling safety, tips for being visible and predictable on the road, information about bike infrastructure, and details about bike pickup logistics and expectations.

In addition to bike recipients chosen from 2022's pool of applicants, students who completed one of the SAFE Learn to Ride courses and met Bike Chicago's eligibility requirements, were also selected to receive new bikes. A total of 53 bikes were distributed to Learn to Ride students, many of whom brought their new bikes to subsequent classes and events supported by the Ambassadors. Notably, 28 Adult Greencorps (a City of Chicago green industry job training program) participants also received bikes, empowering them to utilize cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation while enhancing their mobility throughout the city.

27



Educational virtual workshops

1,272 bikes distributed

986 bike recipients educated

# SAFE School Programming

SAFE School Programming focuses mainly on classroom visits to 2nd and 5th grades, and Driver's Ed classes where we facilitate activities, lessons, and field trips designed to engage students attending those grades. During our classroom visits, we explored the topic of "getting around" with elementary school students, focusing on walking safety for second graders and biking safety for fifth graders. Our lessons invited young Chicagoans to consider the risks and rewards of sharing public spaces like streets and sidewalks.



In addition to classroom visits, our team partners with schools to host fun and interactive events such as walk-and-bike to school, bike skill classes, and transportation safety presentations for parents or guardians.

This year our team visited 51 schools, engaged with 244 classrooms, and educated 6,364 students, effectively increasing our student outreach by over 50% compared to the previous year. Our presentations focused on tips for walking safety for second graders and biking safety for fifth graders. Our lessons prompted young Chicagoans to reflect on the risks and benefits of sharing public spaces, including streets and sidewalks.

In 2024, our program significantly increased driver's education classroom visits in high schools. The Ambassadors engaged with 75 high school classes, marking a 47% increase from the previous year, and educated 2,598 future drivers, a 22% increase from 2023.

The Ambassadors' mobility education for high school students focuses on the "modal hierarchy" of transit planning, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable road users in the design and implementation of new infrastructure. As CDOT continues to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit facilities on Chicago's roads, it is essential for new drivers to understand what they will encounter behind the wheel. Many experienced drivers, often responsible for teaching new drivers, may not be aware of these changes.

121

Events  
at Schools



51 Grade Schools Visited

75 High Schools Visited

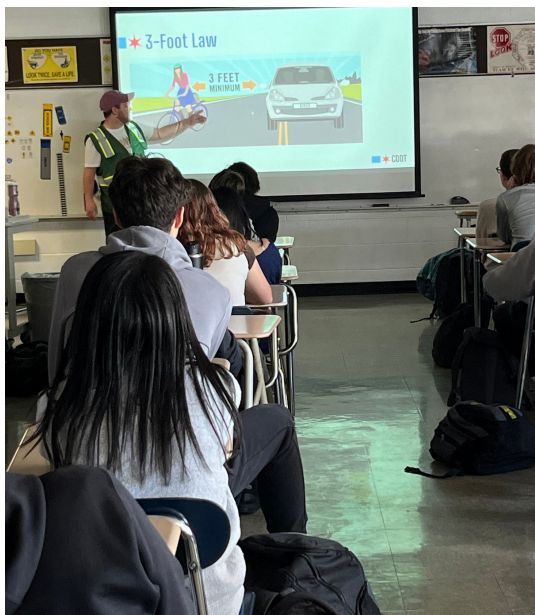
The SAFE program faced challenges due to the influx of immigrant children entering the public school system in Chicago. Many students needed traffic safety information in languages other than Spanish, including Russian, Portuguese, and French Creole. Our team had to find general, widely understood terms to convey key ideas during our school presentations effectively. Language access created some difficulties in facilitating presentations, but our team is finetuning our school request and intake forms to better tailor our educational material and curriculum to the changing demographics of our school districts.

Ambassadors address the knowledge gap on new road safety infrastructure by providing information on traffic calming measures, such as curb bump-outs and chicanes, and discussing various types of bike infrastructure. They also present videos illustrating common collisions between motorists and pedestrians or cyclists, while encouraging a culture change and awareness of dangerous behavior. The presentations include focused discussions on the dangers of speeding and the environmental impact of vehicle emissions.

**6,364 Students Educated**



**2,598 Future Drivers Educated**





In addition to standard presentations and field trips, the SAFE Ambassadors continued building relationships with select schools through existing and new partnerships. For the second year in a row, the SAFE team partnered with Gateway to the Great Outdoors to put on a series of clinics at 3 schools. Students who had never ridden a bike before were taught to ride, new and experienced bikers learned safe riding skills, and the Ambassadors led a group ride as a culmination of the series.

Over the summer, the SAFE Ambassadors led a similar series of sessions at Bret Harte Elementary school, which owns a fleet of bikes procured through an Outride grant. Over the course of 4 sessions, middle school students learned to ride while others fine-tuned their riding skills, and at the end of the summer, SAFE Ambassadors led a ride for students and their principal along Chicago's Lakefront Trail. Long-term partnerships with schools and repeat yearly programming allows for deeper engagement and education, builds trust among students, teachers and parents, and helps to better understand the schools' needs, and support their goals for safer mobility for their community.



**What's on the road ahead:** Expand our school outreach to include more presentations to parents. Identify the best presentation format and content that resonates more to parents, and identify opportunities to collaborate with them to improve mobility safety around their schools.

# New Arrivals Shelter Visits & Engagement

The SAFE Ambassadors have remained dedicated to providing comprehensive safety education for recent migrants, covering crucial topics such as road regulations for cyclists and motorists, and foundational knowledge about Chicago's street infrastructure. From October 2023 to September 2024, our team actively engaged with 8 shelters to address the mobility concerns and questions of migrants.

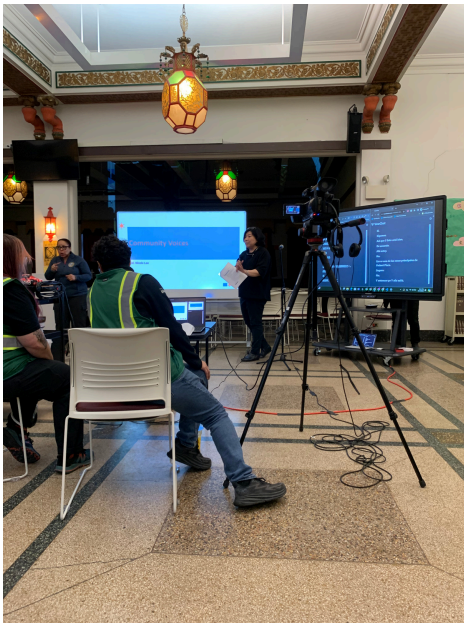
While the program has made significant strides, one hurdle encountered this year was language restrictions. Education and outreach efforts were primarily focused on migrants with Spanish as their first language; however, during our team's visits to shelters, the Ambassadors recognized the need to reach diverse audiences, including those speaking French Creole, Portuguese, and other languages.



**What's on the road ahead:** Translate collateral and educational handouts into languages other than Spanish. Request interpreters to support our team's educational efforts in locations where residents speak multiple languages. Provide pre-recorded videos in multiple languages to shelter managers so they can play them in their common areas. Schedule presentations at other locations in partnership with social service providers working with new arrivals.

# Chicago Mobility Collaborative

Starting in 2023, the SAFE Ambassadors have led the efforts to co-facilitate and improve the reach of the Chicago Mobility Collaborative (CMC), CDOT's largest public forum related to walking, biking, transit, public spaces, mobility justice, and accessibility. CMC meets quarterly at different locations and conducts convenings in a hybrid (video and in person meeting) format.



The SAFE Ambassadors are instrumental in the logistics that make this event possible, as they set and operate all the equipment needed to run a successful hybrid meeting (cameras, laptops, and sound system), in addition to tabling at each meeting to provide general information about the program, and co-facilitate community conversations with representatives of CDOT or neighborhood partners. This is also an opportunity for our team to step into leadership roles as facilitators and event organizers, connect with new partner organizations, expand their reach, and continue building trust among community members.

In 2024, the Ambassadors supported the facilitation of three quarterly meetings. They were fully responsible for organizing and coordinating facilitation of the quarterly meeting in March in Chinatown. The team edited and uploaded to the SAFE YouTube channel three meeting videos, and reached over 245 people total at CMC meetings in person and online.

**What's on the road ahead:** Improve planning and coordination of the CMC quarterly meetings. Develop more intentional opportunities for the Ambassadors to engage with CMC meeting participants to collect feedback, promote SAFE programming, and recruit volunteers.

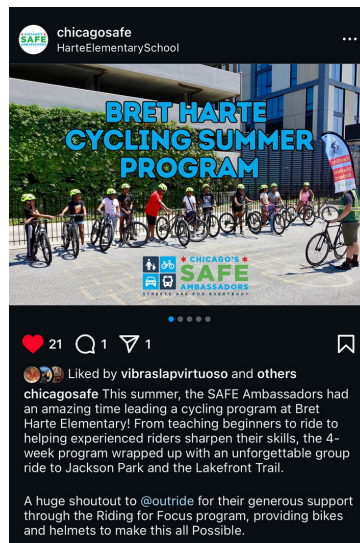


# Online Outreach

This year, the SAFE Ambassadors have focused on keeping our online followers informed about our latest activities. Our social media updates serve as a vital connection to the Chicago community, including past event participants, Learn to Ride students, and Bike Chicago recipients.

We primarily utilize "stories" for program social media updates on our Instagram and Facebook platforms. Stories are vertical images and videos that create a slideshow experience and disappear after 24 hours. In the fiscal year we posted a total of 196 stories, ensuring our followers are always in the loop about our efforts and offerings.

We continue produce short-form educational content focused on transportation safety. This summer, part-time seasonal staff contributed by sharing their own transportation safety tips in a series called "Transportation Tip Tuesdays". One of the topics featured in this series was "How to Share the Road with Micro Mobility Vehicles." This video provides motorists with guidance on safely navigating roads alongside cyclists, scooter riders, skateboarders, and wheelchair users. Based on feedback from our in-person outreach, there is a clear demand for more education on how motorists can effectively share the road with these users

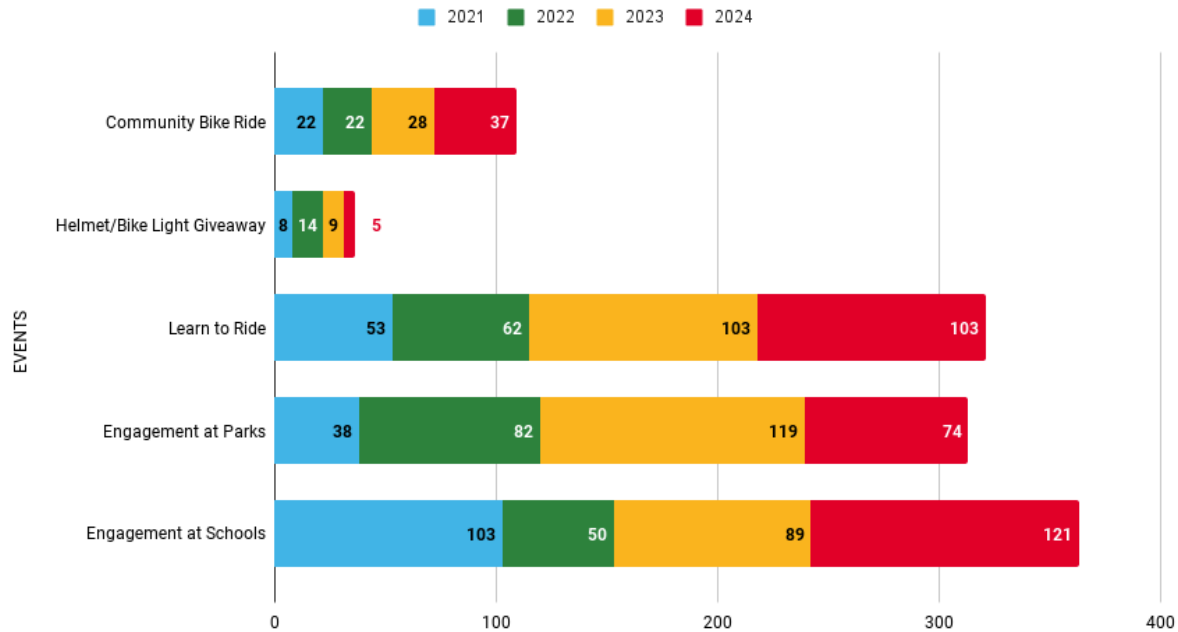


# 3. Measuring Impact

With twenty-three years of experience, the SAFE Ambassadors program continues leading the Chicago Department of Transportation efforts in traffic safety education, relationship-building, and inclusive engagement practices. The following is a summary of our work's impact from 2022 to 2024.

Our team is committed to reducing the frequency and severity of traffic crashes through education of safe mobility practices for cyclists and children, and awareness and tips for motorists for new drivers and the public in general. Every exchange we have with a community member is considered an educational opportunity; however, this year we have started measuring the impact of our education efforts through five main SAFE programs: community bike rides, helmet/bike light giveaways, Learn to Ride, engagement at parks with Junior Ambassadors, and SAFE school programming.

### Event Distribution by Year



In the last four years, the number of events across all our programming has steadily increased post pandemic as our capacity has also increased. During this same time period, our team has made strides to become more strategic in our activities to expand our reach, for example through our social media content to deliver relevant information, while also focusing our work and becoming more intentional with higher touch educational efforts such as our work at schools and through Learn to Ride classes.

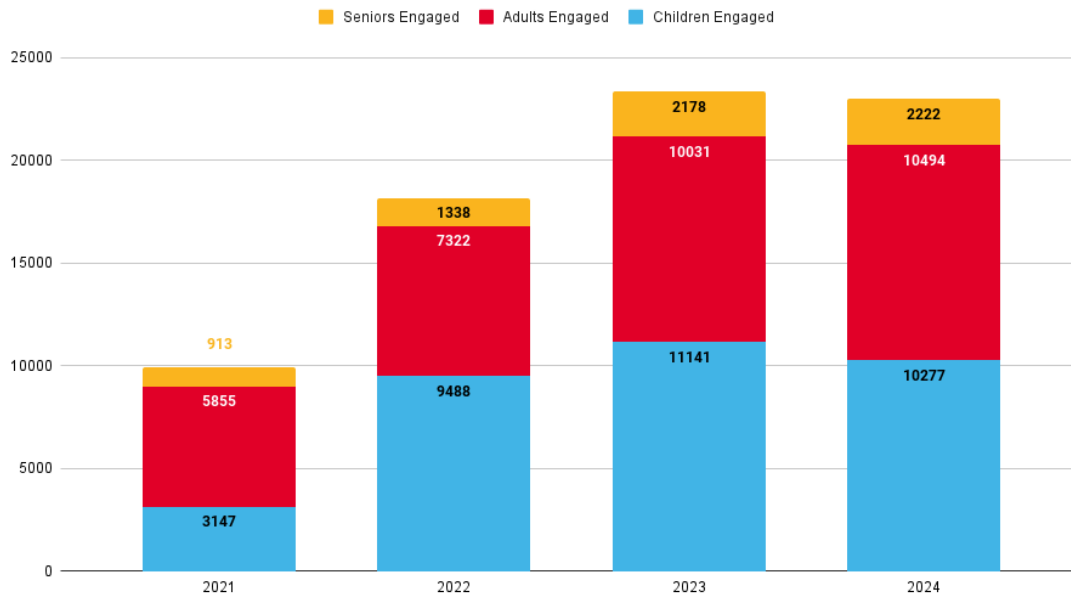




Trust-building between CDOT and Chicagoans has been a priority goal for the SAFE Ambassadors team. We believe that the foundations of long-lasting relationships in our work rely on the following elements: peer-learning approaches, fun, innovative, and culturally appropriate engagement practices, and opportunities to be part of a community. We measure our trust-building impact through the number of repeating partnerships, returning program participants, and our total engagement numbers.

Our data analysis indicates that the number of individuals reached each year has increased across all age groups. Children are the age group with the most prominent growth, particularly after the launch of Kids Learn to Ride in 2022, where we saw our engagement with children tripling that same year. This reflects the interest and trust that families across the City have in our program to teach their children how to safely ride a bicycle.

### Engagement by Age Group



The SAFE program will continue improving our data collection and analysis to better communicate the success and impact of the Ambassadors' work, and how that relates to overall Departmental priorities, and city-wide efforts.

# 4. Looking Ahead

In 2024 the SAFE Program focused on improving our evaluation methods and processes. We reviewed and consolidated reporting forms, as well as program requests forms to better track and more accurately analyze all the information collected in one same platform. These changes will increase our efficiency when submitting reports and providing updates next year. The team will continue refining the forms and our internal systems to ensure that we capture all the data and the stories that can tell a compelling picture of our work and its impact.



Our SAFE School Programming will go through an evaluation process in 2025 to deepen our impact, expand our resources, and improve our educational materials. The Ambassadors will also be facilitating year-round Learn to Ride and Kids Learn to Ride classes, to increase the opportunity for Chicagoans to stay active during the cold months and educate more individuals regarding safe mobility options.

The Ambassadors program will launch a pilot volunteer program in 2025 to increase our capacity and reach. Volunteers will be recruited from the pool of participants from previous Learn to Ride classes, community bike rides, or Chicago Mobility Collaborative meetings. They will be trained to properly assist our team at tabling events, community rides, Bike Chicago distribution days, and other similar events where we have identified the need for additional support.

The SAFE Ambassadors are looking forward to another dynamic, interactive and challenging season in 2025. We will continue relying on our community partners, supporters, and sponsors to reach more people, contribute to the reduction of fatal and severe crashes, increase the use of sustainable modes of transportation, build and strengthen trust between CDOT and Chicagoans, and raise awareness about traffic safety campaigns, projects, and initiatives across the city.



# Acknowledgements

With sincere gratitude, we recognize the contributions of the following agencies and organizations that supported our team and played an essential role in making this 2024 SAFE Ambassadors' season possible:

## Program Funders

Chicago Department of Transportation  
Illinois Department of Transportation

## Sponsors

811 Chicago  
Divvy/Lyft  
Bimbo Bakeries  
Kozy's Cyclery  
Lime  
Lurie's Children's Hospital  
Nuun  
SockGuy  
TruFru

## Interagency Partners

Chicago City Clerk  
Chicago Park District  
Chicago Public Schools  
Chicago Park District  
Chicago Department of Finance

## Community Collaborators

Communities in Schools (CIS)  
Equiticity  
Gateway to the Great Outdoors (GGO)  
Oak Street Health  
Southwest Collective  
Think Outside Da Block  
We Keep You Rollin'  
Working Bikes  
Northwest Center

**We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to foster safer streets and to increase education and awareness on transportation projects.**