

AT BAT YOUTH SPORTS

A Motown Original Out-of-School Time Program

In November 2015, entrepreneur and serious baseball fan Delrisha Hayes founded *At Bat, Inc.*, a community-based organization (CBO) that focuses on out-of-school time (OST) services to provide baseball and softball activities for youth in urban communities. African Americans have been under-represented in major league baseball, and she knew that children in Detroit, and elsewhere, were less likely to learn and participate due to limited access to transportation, equipment, and program availability.

Today, with support and training from the Youth Development Resource Center (YDRC), *At Bat* provides programming after school at partnering schools and through summer camps in the community. Participating youth enjoy the benefits of physical activity (and a healthy snack) as they learn the fundamentals of baseball. Enrolled youth also develop their academic knowledge and skills in literacy, SEL (social emotional learning), and STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).

At Bat depends on in-person group activities and participation, which are more challenging to conduct during the summer. During the school year, students are already present at an indoor/outdoor facility to participate after school, only needing a ride home later. An all-outside, part-time summer camp presents recruitment issues and requires more family commitment. Even then, many working parents cannot provide reliable transportation. When the pandemic struck, all OST programs were hard hit as schools and other facilities were closed to in-person activities, participation plummeted, and funding disappeared. For most of 2020, including the entire summer, youth suffered immense learning loss, together with an absence of healthy physical, social, and emotional engagement.

SECTION 23E GRANT FUNDING

In March 2021, CBOs like *At Bat* became eligible to receive help for desperately needed youth programs with the passage of Public Act 3, Section 23e, which provided grant funding to K-8-aged children. *At Bat* applied with the aim of increasing its capacity to provide more and better in-person summer programming.

At Bat uses baseball and softball as tools to connect STEM education, strengthen reading skills, and deliver SEL for youth participants. The proposal satisfied the 23e program purposes and requirements, and *At Bat* received one of the 49 funded grants, which together totaled \$5 million.



“[B]baseball is an exquisite sport that at-risk youth do not have access to because of cost, transportation, and program availability.” At Bat “[serves] as a tool for connecting STEM education, strengthening reading skills, and delivering [SEL] to student participants.”

– Delrisha Hayes,
Founder, *At Bat, Inc.*

Detroit At Bat 23e Summer Program

Thanks to the grant award, *At Bat* was able to extend its 2021 summer camp both in participant capacity and in daily and total program length; moreover, educational content was broadened and deepened, while maintaining its focus on how sports can contribute to whole child wellness.

The 23e grant funding figured prominently in each of the following operational components of the *At Bat* 2021 summer day program.

Operational Components

Site and Participants. The program was conducted at Peterson Park in Detroit. In addition to the public park's size and layout (it has previously hosted Major League Baseball "Pitch, Hit & Run" events), the location allowed for children to participate without parental transportation or supervision enroute.

Grant funding permitted an extension in the program hours per day to be from 10 a.m. to 2.30 p.m., in days per week to Tuesday through Friday, and in total weeks to 10.

About 12-15 mostly elementary-aged children participated daily, with all necessary equipment, and food and drink, provided by *At Bat*.

Staffing and Training. Program staff consisted of Ms. Hayes and her specially recruited volunteers. All staff not only supervised program activities but also functioned as community mentors to the participants. Ms. Hayes is her own researcher and possesses substantial experience in sports and with youth development programs. She has engaged in a variety of pertinent professional development over the years—for example, SEL, child development, and safety training during the 2020-2021 school year. In addition to formal training (e.g., in program design and assessment tools), the YDRC assists Ms. Hayes through arranging for a coach from the community, as well as informal opportunities to gain experience from other youth program providers.

Curriculum and Activities. *At Bat* provided a structured program constructed from daily to weekly to a summer-long curriculum. Thus, during a typical program day, participants in age groups would rotate through four "stations," each with specified sports activities, such as baseball drills or other sports-related opportunities. For example, participants practiced conditioning, teamwork, and game rules and strategies.

The grant helped Ms. Hayes to expand and align the summer program with the school year curricula. Accordingly, station activities were designed to incorporate more robust STEM,

literary, and SEL education, with a different STEM theme each day of the week (e.g., Tuesdays were science days). Each participant developed sports skills and self-confidence as they progressed at their own pace toward their own goals. Finally, each successive week's activities gave increasingly challenging opportunities for improvement from the summer's beginning to end.

Successes and Challenges

The 23e grant helped solidify *At Bat*'s comeback from the pandemic's negative effects on its ability to serve the Detroit community in *At Bat*'s unique way. Building on the summer's success, *At Bat* has continued the revitalization of its after-school and related programming during the 2021-2022 school year, even adding a partner, Carver STEM Academy in October 2021.

At Bat and the other 23e grantees benefited from the first round of grants, which enabled them to meet the ongoing requirements for effective OST programming. Ms. Hayes suggests that future funding be flexible so CBOs could design and implement their efforts to better fit disparate or varying local contexts. She also identified the importance of data at the granular level essential to ascertaining specific community needs. Such an approach would support the transition of a very good emergency program into a great sustainable one.