

LSC RHODE ISLAND

Report to the Community 2019

PAWTUCKET | CENTRAL FALLS
HEALTH EQUITY ZONE





Executive Director
Jeanne Cola

A place-based, resident-led approach to health equity.

Four years ago, the RI Department of Health launched a groundbreaking initiative for improving the health of our communities. Instead of telling local communities how to change the social determinants of health of their residents, the department created targeted zones where local partners would form a collaborative working group, conduct listening sessions with residents and local leaders, and then determine for themselves the list of priorities for achieving better health for their community.

This resident-led, place-based approach to health equity engaged and motivated residents. They formed community lead collaboratives that are making decisions about what health is – what’s important to them and how they want to make improvements. Residents are talking about transportation, housing, and access to healthy food and culturally competent healthcare – and we are working with them to address those concerns.

We’ve seen tremendous progress in Pawtucket and Central Falls in the past 4 years. We’ve seen programs develop for workforce training through the YMCA and through Pawtucket Central Falls Development Corporation and Farm Fresh. We’ve seen community gardens pop up in parks and at the Pawtucket Housing Authority. And we’ve seen the opening of the Central Falls Neighborhood Health Station, a groundbreaking new facility that is a one-stop resource for culturally-competent medical, dental, and

behavioral health services – as well as resources for health education and recreation needs. These are just a few of the tremendous changes we’ve seen in Pawtucket and Central Falls.

As we look forward to the next four years as the backbone agency for the Pawtucket Central Falls Health Equity Zone, we are adding two new areas to our focus: climate sustainability and the opioid epidemic. Work is already underway to assess the impact and risks, and engage the communities most affected by these issues.

Many thanks go out to the Rhode Island Department of Health as our funding partner, and to the agencies on the ground who are doing this work every day. No one person or group does this work alone. It’s through the collaboration of our partners where the work gets done. There is still much to do, but by working together, identifying best practices and supporting the work by community partners, we can foster the teamwork necessary to produce a much greater impact.

Jeanne Cola
Executive Director, LISC Rhode Island

When LISC started as the backbone agency for Pawtucket-Central Falls Health Equity Zone, we knew that a place-based strategy that builds on the strengths of local residents and partners would achieve great results. This kind of resident-led strategy has helped create successes for LISC nationwide over the past 4 decades – it’s clear to us that people on the front lines of an issue have a true perspective on the need, and a strong commitment to creating real, positive change.

We began the work of listening. We brought together local groups, organizations, residents, leaders, businesses, and health professionals for many conversations about what was needed to help Pawtucket Central Falls thrive. Since we were addressing the social determinants of health, we asked broad questions about what people thought about, what they needed, what stood in the way – and how change would help.

We ended up with a collaborative of more than 60 organizations and residents eager to roll up their sleeves and do the hard work to improve health outcomes. We created a 108-item action plan, organized into categories, and started checking them off. At the end of the 4 years, the plan is dog-eared, highlighted, crossed off – but the partnerships are still going strong and working together to make a real difference for the Pawtucket Central Falls community. We are stronger together than when we try to go it alone – This initiative is proof positive.

PEACE BED: Partner Southside Community Land Trust took an abandoned field at Galego Court in Pawtucket and transformed it into a gardening mega-center. It is now home to 72 garden beds, fruit trees, and geodesic domes for teaching sessions, farmer’s market training and community building for the residents.



Building Healthy Neighborhoods



Overwhelmingly, residents identified the need to improve access to culturally relevant health care. The Neighborhood Health Station is committed to enrolling 90% of Central Falls residents in programs that will empower an entire community to strive for optimal health and well-being.

Access to Healthcare



Providing access to all facets of healthcare is exactly what partner Ray Lavoie, Executive Director at Blackstone Valley Community Health Care and Dr. Michael Fine had in mind when they developed the concept of a full-service health station – one that would address nearly all of the health care needs of an entire city. The plan was ambitious and offered a new model for health care delivery where preventative and educational programs would work side by side with health care practitioners. This new, state-of-the-art facility is not only a hub for classes in nutrition, diabetes prevention, and financial literacy, but it also provides access to culturally competent primary health care doctors, recovery programs, dental, and behavioral specialists.

Construction costs for the project were estimated at \$15 million. Community partners including Teknor Apex and the Rhode Island Foundation, as well as our Congressional Delegation, rallied together to raise well over \$1 million. LISC Rhode Island was able to invest more than \$12.6 million through the Healthy Futures Fund using equity enhancing tax credits to help this transformational initiative become a reality.





HEZ partners across the Collaborative got to work quickly to improve access to healthy fruits and vegetables in our communities.

Access to Healthy Foods



Healthy Food was a key priority for the community and several important programs led the way to increased access to fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as delicious café options. HEZ partner **Southside Community Land Trust** took over an abandoned garden at the edge of a major public housing complex in Pawtucket (**Galego Court**) and renovated the area to produce a vibrant garden with more than 70 beds. Master Gardeners and two apprentice growers worked with student volunteers from the **Center for Dynamic Learning** to remove invasive species, improve the soil, begin planting and create two large geodesic domes used for plant starts and teaching programs. The new garden offers a peaceful respite for residents and an opportunity to grow their own healthy produce.

As part of the community needs assessments, **Garfield Park** was identified as a place in desperate need of a makeover. Over years of neglect, it had turned into a dilapidated playground and late night hang out. This space, in the heart of the neighborhood and adjacent to a child care facility, had the potential to become a valuable community asset. Thanks to funding from the Citizens Bank/LISC Growing Communities

initiatives and from the United Way, community partners from **GroundWork Rhode Island**, Southside Community Land Trust and **Farm Fresh RI**, the park is now the site of a vibrant community garden, weekly farmer's market, and updated playground.

Food on the Move, a program of the non-profit Rhode Island Public Health Institute, is a year-round mobile market that aims to reduce food insecurity by bringing food directly to the communities that need it the most. In Pawtucket and Central Falls, Food on the Move makes stops at **Fogarty and Forand Manors** and the **Blackstone Valley Community Action Program** where the community can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and receive a 50% discount on produce purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program dollars. Food on the Move is supported by grants from **AARP Foundation, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Foundation, and the Rhode Island Department of Health.**





LISC Rhode Island and Citizens Bank awarded Harvest Kitchen a Growing Communities Grant in 2018 to help fund its workforce development programs.



Improve Access to Jobs & Income

Harvest Kitchen—a new culinary training program and restaurant is a great example of collaborative partners working together to achieve multiple goals.

Harvest Kitchen has become the “go to” spot in downtown Pawtucket to pick up a healthy salad, hearty soup, fermented vegetables, or delicious and healthy apple chips. The program, done in partnership with **Farm Fresh RI** and **Pawtucket Central Falls Development**, also provides Harvest Kitchen trainees with valuable work experience and an important pathway to employment.

Trainees get hands-on retail experience selling their goods at farmers’ markets, working in the local foods café in downtown Pawtucket, and catering local events. One regular event includes the hugely popular “Homework Diner,” an afterschool program at **Agnes Little Elementary School** for students and their families where families share a healthy meal, children can work with teachers and staff on homework questions, and adults engage in parent workshops around financial literacy, safety, parenting and support services.

Like all great ideas, the program at

Harvest Kitchen was a dream for several community development organizations at the same time. Pawtucket Central Falls Development had renovated the building at 2 Bayley Street in Pawtucket as part of a larger downtown multi-site initiative. Executive Director Linda Weisinger thought the first floor space would be ideal for a café and a commercial kitchen. But it was the collaboration with Farm Fresh that made that dream a reality. According to Farm Fresh Chef Jen Stott, seeds of the idea were planted as early as 2009. Farm Fresh had a bounty crop of local apples and wanted to make applesauce, and they would need a commercial kitchen space and a staff. And they also wanted to work with at-risk local youth and help them find a path to success.

The end result is a beautiful space where youth ages 16-19 involved with the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) work through a 15-week training session where they create delicious products using locally sourced fruits and



vegetables. After the 15-weeks, trainees are placed into a 5-week paid internship with local restaurants. To date, more than 130 youth have participated since 2010 and 70% of trainees have graduated from the program. Chef Jen and the students work with local farmers to reduce food waste by using B-grade, surplus, and gleaned produce in the Harvest Kitchen line of signature value-added products like applesauce, pickled string beans, carrots, zucchini, and more. The farm fresh menu includes breakfast-all-day and lunch favorites like wraps, sandwiches, salads, soups, and bowls—all featuring fresh, locally grown ingredients.



Housing & Homelessness

One of the most important social determinants of health is whether residents have safe, consistent, affordable housing. **Housing is Health Care.**

According to the 2018 Housing Fact Book, an in depth analysis of housing data from HousingWorks RI at Roger Williams University, the continuous climb in the cost of housing and the limited housing stock has resulted in more than 35% of all households in Rhode Island being cost burdened. A household is considered cost-burdened if

they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. By using that measure, nearly 50% of renters in Pawtucket are cost-burdened, and in Central Falls 60% of renters fall into that category.

That's why the work done by Pawtucket Central Falls Development Corporation is critical to improving the health equity of the area, and progress is happening. Last year, PCFD finished the Branch Blackstone project which took an abandoned and overgrown field on the banks of the Blackstone River and created a new, beautiful community.

The development involves the creation of 29 new affordable housing units in four buildings along Branch Street by the Blackstone River in Pawtucket, as well as the rehabilitation of 17 affordable apartments on five scattered sites in Pawtucket and Central Falls.

The project was funded through a variety of partners, including LISC, the Federal Home Loan Bank Boston, RI Housing and Pawtucket Credit Union. The first units completed were occupied almost immediately.



“Transforming Branch Street from a blighted, neglected street to a vibrant affordable neighborhood with play space for children and greenspace for all is what all individuals and families want and need to succeed. The new construction and rehab of the additional affordable units in the area will make an enormous impact in the community, and we are proud to have been able to participate,”

Joseph Silva
Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending,
Pawtucket Credit Union.



Quality of Life

The past 4 years have been busy adding elements big and small to improve the quality of life for residents. Here is a small list of programs:

- Creation of the PCF HEZ online resource guide available at <http://rilisc.org/hez-resource-guide/> provides a complete guide to services available in the area.
- Passed the first Green and Complete Street Ordinance in New England for development in Central Falls. This will help future development include green infrastructure including plantings, trees, bike lanes, and resident-friendly construction.
- Updated new walking trails through Central Falls and Pawtucket and created walking groups and programming to get people out and moving. Many thanks to our partners at the **Empowerment Factory** for all they've done to make this happen.
- The **YMCA** Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do-it! Child Obesity program is helping to work with children to teach nutrition and good health through whole-family cooking.
- **Pawtucket Central Falls Development** held home ownership training classes to help potential home owners navigate the process and become informed buyers.
- **Progreso Latino** continued to deliver top-notch Diabetes Prevention Programs to residents to help educate and lower Diabetes rates in the area.



Youth and Senior Engagement



Youth and senior isolation was identified as a pivotal and widespread need, that when addressed, had tremendous power to improve the social determinants of health for residents.

Senior isolation is an area of acute need. As our population ages, relationships fall away and social opportunities become fewer. We heard that teen and intergenerational engagement would help root communities and build social cohesion. Since positive interaction and a strong sense of community are important social determinants of health for all residents, we looked for a solution that would address both groups.

Grant funding from the **Tufts Health Plan Foundation** allowed LISC Rhode Island to plan storytelling workshops with partners from the **Rhode Island Black Storytellers** and **Rhode Island Latino Arts**, which was paired with a nutrition program using fresh produce from **Southside Community Land Trust, Farm Fresh RI** and **Food on the Move**. Either a movement component or a craft was added and we had a program that was entertaining, engaging and provided an opportunity to forge relationships across generations.

We knew the program was working when we heard about Maria Bashide, an 87-year-old immigrant from Cabo Verde, who had become isolated and withdrawn as the result of language barriers. Bashide spoke some English, but was more comfortable with Portuguese. Through the program, she met a group of high school students from the Cape Verde Club at Central Falls High School and it changed Bashide's world. The teens appreciated the senior's stories and wisdom, the senior appreciated the teens' enthusiasm and energy, and they all became fast friends who carried on the relationship well after the program was finished. The program was a success, and LISC has gone on to partner with **Tufts Health Plan Foundation** to offer the program through other Health Equity Zones.



Collaborative partners found that unpacking the health-related reasons that students miss school is critical for improving attendance. Statistics show that 1 in 7 students in the U.S. miss nearly a month of school each year and parents are often unaware of how missing just 2 days a month can put their child off track. With this information, it was clear that chronic absenteeism is a proven early warning sign of academic risk & school dropout.

The Agnes E. Little School, led by Community Schools Coordinator Emily Mallozzi, created **the Walking School Bus** to address these issues. Each morning, a group of parents, teachers and PCF HEZ members would begin the walk to school – stopping at houses along the route to pick up students. The volunteers carried on through any

kind of weather and made it fun for the kids. It was a huge success for the students. Some kids, who had felt a bit shy, started the day off with a welcoming group of friends. It gave parents a feeling of security too when they saw their children walking to school with classmates and adults.

The program had an incredible and observable impact. Absences decreased by 63.25% and tardiness decreased by 80.51%. Teachers reported that the children came in ready to learn, and the statistics supported that too. The STAR math standardized test scores improved by approximately 100 points. The program was so successful that it has been expanded to Henry Winters School and there are plans to add more.

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What's Next: Climate Resiliency and Opioid Prevention

As the HEZ Collaborative continues its work in the six key strategy areas, we have expanded our programs to address two additional critical issues that threaten our area: Climate Resiliency and **Opioid Prevention**.

This summer, LISC conducted a community needs assessment specifically related to opioid prevention. We gathered community leaders, the medical community, experts in the field, law enforcement, school administrators, and residents to identify the need and pinpoint ways to create change. While there are significant resources being deployed in the area, Pawtucket and Central Falls have very high overdose rates and more needs to be done. Five goals emerged that target youth through the schools, create an outdoor advertising program to educate and direct people to resources, and to work to increase positive social opportunities and employment. We are working with our partners in both cities to help provide 24-hour assistance to all residents experiencing substance use disorder including men, women, youth, and families.

Climate Resiliency is another priority and through our partnership with GroundWork Rhode Island, we are working directly with homeowners to conduct climate resiliency assessments and lending a hand to create climate mitigating solutions. GroundWork Rhode Island has created a "Green Change Makers" led by Kufa Castro, a local artist and educator, who is working with the city and environmental advocacy organizations to review current and historical maps of the area and assess existing community vulnerabilities. GroundWork Rhode Island will construct three hands-on landscaping projects that will address climate change through stormwater runoff, heat-island mitigation, and soil improvement. GroundWork Rhode Island's Green Change Makers has also volunteered at the Taft Street Community Garden in Pawtucket, helping to make that a great success.

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Many thanks to all of the Collaborative Members of the PCF HEZ.

American Heart Association
Anchor Recovery
Blackstone Community Health Team
Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center
Blackstone Valley Community Action Program
Blackstone Valley Community Health Center
Boys and Girls Club of Pawtucket
Boys Town
Broad Street Regeneration Project
Brown Family Medicine
Care New England
Care New England Center for Treatment
Central Falls Housing Authority
Central Falls Office on Health
Central Falls Parks and Recreation Department
Central Falls Planning Department
Central Falls Police Department
Central Falls Prevention
Central Falls School Department
Childrens' Friend
City of Central Falls
City of Pawtucket
Childhood Lead Action Project
Collette Travel
Farm Fresh Rhode Island
Fuerza-Laboral
Gateway Healthcare
GroundWork Rhode Island
Home Health and Hospice Nursing Placement

HUD
Navigant Credit Union
Memorial Hospital
PawSox Baseball Club
Pawtucket Central Falls Development
Pawtucket Department of Planning
Pawtucket Housing Authority
Pawtucket Police Department
Pawtucket Prevention Coalition Project
Pawtucket School Department
Progreso Latino
Rhode Island Black Storytellers
Rhode Island Latino Arts
Rhode Island Parent Information Network
Rhode Island Public Health Institute
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence
RI Department of Health
RI House of Representatives
RI SBIRT Training & Resource Center
RICARES
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State of RI Food Strategy Director
The Empowerment Factory
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