



07 PEOPLE PLAN

This section of our Plan addresses topics designed to ensure that residents are healthy, self-sufficient and that they and their children are academically successful and career-ready. While the public housing residents that live in the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood are the primary focus of these initiatives, neighborhood residents will benefit as well. This is especially true since the demographic profile of neighborhood and public housing residents is similar.

A community is only as good as its people. Implementation of the projects outlined on the following pages will empower residents, strengthen local capacity, and build a stronger neighborhood. People Plan strategies and implementation actions are designed to improve opportunities for the low and moderate-income households that call the Downtown/ East Side Choice Neighborhood home.



PEOPLE PLAN VISION

Residents are self-sufficient and have easy access to amenities and services to meet their daily needs.

- » Transportation options are known and used
- » Food security (grocery stores/food pantries/ mobile food options) is the norm
- » Health care access is improved
- » New business development improves choice
- » Investment in youth is a priority
- » Educational opportunities improve family outcomes
- » Gathering places and programs are available to residents
- » Neighborhood-based self-sufficiency resources are promoted and used



OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Priority Outcomes

- » Children enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- » Children are proficient in core academic subjects.
- » All youth graduate from high school and are college- or career-ready.

Framing the Challenge

The availability of good schools is critical to creating neighborhoods of choice. Parents look for school districts with programs designed to help their children succeed when they are choosing where to live. While current neighborhood residents have positive feelings about the local schools, test scores published annually in the Illinois School Report Cards show that fewer students are meeting State standards than State-wide averages. Obstacles to academic achievement include a high student mobility rate, especially at the elementary school level, a high percentage of low-income and minority students, and low percentages of students rated as ready for the next grade level or ready for college course work.

Optics are critical to the attraction of new families to Chicago Heights generally, and the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood in particular. The regional housing market must recognize the success the education system has achieved in order to make the Downtown/East Side a destination of choice.

What Our Residents Have Told Us

Residents of the Sunrise/Mackler/Bergen target housing believe that Chicago Heights is a good place to raise children. Households with school-age children expressed strong satisfaction with Lincoln-Gavin School (grades K-4), with 88% of households indicating that they were very or somewhat happy with the school. These households expressed a similar satisfaction rate for the middle school their children attended. The satisfaction rate for parents with children attending Bloom Township High School was even higher with 96% of resident needs assessment survey respondents indicating that they were very or somewhat happy with the high school.

Parents considered the schools that their children attend to be welcoming places and felt comfortable contacting teachers to check on student progress. A strong majority of the resident needs assessment survey respondents indicated that they found report cards and other materials sent home from school easy to understand, and regularly asked their children about what went on at school each day. Still, better schools were recognized as important. Development of a parenting network and programming was suggested by residents and service providers who participated in the planning process.

Both Sunrise/Mackler/Bergen and neighborhood parents indicated that they take advantage of

available activities for their children. Programs offered at the Jones Center, Chicago Heights Park District, neighborhood schools and church youth programs were all popular choices. However, approximately 25% of parents indicated that their children did not participate in out-of-school activities on a regular basis. The main reasons why children don't participate include not knowing what activities are available, lack of interest and cost. A few parents indicated that transportation was also a barrier.

Residents identified cost as a factor in keeping parents from enrolling their children in out-of-school programs, accessing early learning or child care, and engaging in community learning programming. Community Wi-Fi services and computer centers were identified as desired community amenities. Participants in the resident needs assessment survey were asked to identify activities or classes that they would like to see available for neighborhood youth. The top ten choices were: 1) recreation/sports, 2) music/band/singing/dance, 3) arts and crafts, 4) computer classes, 5) job skills training/employment assistance, 6) social activities, 7) academic tutoring/homework assistance, 8) life skills/financial/literacy/civility classes, 9) youth leadership, and 10) cooking/healthy eating.



Assets to Build On

Educational service providers at all levels were actively engaged in the Choice Neighborhoods planning process and the development of the strategies and programmatic initiatives designed to overcome identified obstacles to academic success. These partners include Illinois Action for Children, School District 170, Bloom High School District 206, and Prairie State College, among others. A new state-of-the-art middle school is scheduled to open in 2020 to serve neighborhood children. The Housing Authority has scholarships available to help public housing residents further their education at community colleges. Improving family outcomes, including educational achievement, is a Housing Authority priority.

Extensive educational resources are located within in the area, including a new middle school, Bloom Township High School and Prairie State College, which are all located less than a mile from the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood. Lincoln-Gavin School is located on Center Avenue between 15th and 16th Streets, serving grades K-4, in the heart of the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood.



Measuring Progress

As we implement our strategies our progress can be tracked by metrics that include improved test scores, number and percentage of children who are kindergarten-ready, and improved attendance rates.

EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY:

Develop and implement initiatives designed to improve school attendance in order to improve test scores and academic outcomes over time and better connect parents and children to educational resources.

★ 5-step campaign for improving attendance from preschool to high school Priority Project

To improve academic performance, dramatically reducing absenteeism is a critical first step. Children must be present at school to learn the curriculum. Over 39% of Lincoln-Gavin Elementary School and Bloom High School students are chronic absentees, defined as students missing at least 10% of the school days within an academic year. This chronic level of absenteeism is more than double the state average of 17.5%.

Reducing absenteeism is a simple, cost-effective, but often overlooked strategy for improving academic performance. In the early years of a student's academic life, poor habits are less likely to be entrenched and easier to improve. When children are present to learn, we forecast an improvement in test scores.

Performance Metrics:

- » Within three years, we will reduce chronic absenteeism by half at the high school to 19.5% and more dramatically at Lincoln-Gavin School with a goal of 13%.
- » Improve test scores by 25% by the end of year 3.

Partners and Resources:

- » School District 170
- » School District 206
- » Illinois Action for Children
- » Catholic Charities for food pantries & meal delivery
- » CEDA for SNAP, WIC and other social services
- » Cook County Public Health
- » Bloom Township Food Pantry, Inc.

Actions Steps and Timing:

- 1 Engage students and parents.** Although resident needs assessment survey respondents say they are comfortable at their child's school, their infrequent presence there would indicate otherwise. Building a warm, welcoming environment can produce a school-wide culture that promotes a sense of safety, respect, and personal responsibility. A key component of the engagement is helping parents understand what their children are learning when they are in school, and the negative effects chronic absenteeism has on realizing their hopes and dreams for their children. **Timing:** *campaign launch through year 3.*
- 2 Recruit parents to become "attendance ambassadors,"** role models and liaisons between schools and other parents. We will work with our attendance ambassadors to establish how to recognize positive and improved attendance in a way that will drive success. These ideas will be used to provide quarterly recognition and incentives to students and families who have good and improved attendance. **Timing:** *At the close of each quarter, year 1-year 3.*

3 Monitor attendance and test scores. Use available data tools to examine attendance patterns and identify students who are at risk due to poor attendance. Provide data on a regular basis to school administrators. Recognize progress at the family, school and community level. Compare test scores and their correlation with attendance. Create data-sharing agreements with local school districts that allow for tracking grades, test scores and attendance for students living at the Housing Authority's family sites and for voucher holders.

Timing: campaign launch - through year 3 coordinated with the mandated test schedule.

4 Personalize early outreach. Use attendance monitoring data to trigger early outreach to families and students who are missing too many days of school. Such outreach is essential for identifying barriers to attendance – hunger, access to health care, homelessness, transportation or other challenges – and the supports or resources that would help improve attendance. Work with partners to clear these barriers.

Timing: first 45 days and every 45 days through year 3.

5 Develop programmatic responses to barriers. Work with local social service providers such as the food banks, health care system and others to overcome identified barriers. Include after-school and summer programming staff, making sure they are equipped to engage in messaging about the importance of attendance including helping families know when school starts. Use summer and after school programming to reach out to chronically absent students and connect them to health and social supports that will improve attendance during the school year. Ensure there are regular meetings of all area social service providers. *Timing: first 45 days – year 3.*

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Improve academic performance long-term.
- » Prepare Choice Neighborhood children for college and/or our nation's workforce.
- » Act as catalyst for a cultural shift – making education a serious priority.
- » Create a community focused on the long-term success of its children.
- » Support families who are focused on the best outcomes for their children.

★ Kindergarten Readiness Initiative Priority Project

This project involves an educational campaign for parents and preschools to help prepare children for kindergarten.

There are 1,617 children in Chicago Heights from birth to age five who are low income, 240 of whom live in the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood. Choice Neighborhood students spend most of their kindergarten academic year catching up with the state-wide kindergarten ready standards. Current Lincoln-Gavin School kindergarten students on average scored 12% on the fall kindergarten readiness assessment.

Performance Metrics:

Improve kindergarten readiness average from 12% to 50% in 3 years. In doing so, we will also raise community awareness about the importance of early brain development.

Partners and Resources:

- » School District 170
- » Illinois Action for Children
- » All local preschool and childcare providers
- » Achievement Gap Initiative @ Harvard
- » Reach Out & Read
- » Cook County Public Health
- » CEDA for SNAP, WIC and other social services
- » Cook County Public Health, particularly pediatricians & obstetricians
- » Housing Authority of Cook County

Actions Steps and Timing:

- » Identify the preschools whose students score 50% or less on kindergarten readiness. Work with these preschools to adjust curriculum to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten. Create incentives, awards and recognition to schools who have the strongest early learning components. Make preschools aware of current kindergarten readiness scores. **Timing:** launch through year 3.

- » Make sure parents are aware of current kindergarten readiness scores. Help parents select preschools with most effective kindergarten readiness programs. **Timing:** launch through year 3.
- » Work with parents and preschool teachers to learn about the importance of brain development. Use Five Basics from the Harvard Achievement Gap Initiative to educate teachers and preschool parents about early brain growth.
- » Host a launch party with Dr. Ron Ferguson from Harvard University's Achievement Gap Initiative to discuss why the early years are so important to children, particularly children from low-income families. **Timing:** launch party in first 3 months & educational campaign through year 3.
- » Host local preschool marketing parties. Have current students' parents address the group about the benefits and safety of preschool for their own child. Have Head Start grantees discuss the safety rails that are in currently in place as well as address any parent safety concerns. **Timing:** Month 1 and quarterly through year 3.

- » Host registration fairs to help parents with the application process, in partnership with preschools that have the best kindergarten readiness scores, **Timing:** *Month 1 and quarterly through year 3.*
- » Because some parents are concerned with educators coming into their homes, establish Early Head Start weekly programming in Sunrise community room. **Timing:** *launch through year 3.*
- » Increase awareness in Home Visiting programs. Research shows that these programs improve educational outcomes.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Create a community focused on the long-term success of its children.
- » Encourage parents to focus on the best outcomes for their children.
- » Improve school performance long-term.
- » Improves preschool quality.
- » Build a strong neurological and educational foundation for the neighborhood's youngest children.



**PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:
ILLINOIS ACTION FOR
CHILDREN**

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) is a state and national leader in the early care and education community. Chicago Heights is fortunate to have IAFC providing its services to children throughout the community at its state of the art building located at Prairie State College.

IAFC's outreach and work with low-income, hard-to-reach families, has led it to ensure that early care and education, and other opportunities, are accessible to the children most in need. Since 1969, IAFC has worked to create systems of early care and education that help strengthen families and communities.

IAFC's Head Start and Early Head Start programs build upon innovative direct service early education programs – most notably, its Community Connections Preschool model. This program links home-based child care providers with center-based Preschool for All classroom experiences for 3- and 4-year-olds. Additionally, its Early Head Start program for parents of children birth to 3 years old offers enrollment opportunities for pregnant women.

INVESTMENT IN YOUTH STRATEGY:

Build on existing programs for youth and new program ideas to fill service gaps and ensure that all neighborhood youth have the tools needed to succeed academically and grow into self-sufficient adults.

“Summer slide” reduction project

This effort is designed to ensure that students are academically ready to begin the next school year. A coordinated approach will be used to ensure that summer camp programming includes fun, educational components in addition to more traditional programming. The Chicago Heights Park District and the Jones Center both have robust summer programming.

Performance Metric:

Choice Neighborhood children will reduce the impact of summer slide from three months to only three weeks. Having to spend less time regaining lost academic ground will help students progress more rapidly and learn more in each academic year.

Partners and Resources:

- » School District 170
- » School District 206
- » Chicago Heights Park District
- » Jones Center
- » Prairie State College
- » Illinois Action for Children
- » Catholic Charities for food pantries
- » CEDA for SNAP, WIC and other social services
- » Housing Authority of Cook County

Actions Steps and Timing:

- » Educate parents about the importance of academic refreshers during the summer. Let them know that their children will have more school success if they take small steps to remember their prior year lessons.
- » Create team competition between grades regarding summer slide prevention. For example, provide a pizza party for the grade that held their learning level most effectively throughout the summer.
- » The Chicago Heights schools will create a summer curriculum to prevent the summer slide for students from kindergarten-12th grade. This curriculum will be distributed through summer camps at the Jones Center, the Chicago Heights Park District and all other summer sports and youth activities. Chicago Heights teachers will

provide a list of their favorite games and activities reinforcing topics that need to be reviewed at each grade level.

- » Lincoln-Gavin and Bloom High School will provide summer workbooks to students with incentives for completion.
- » Each summer youth activity group will reserve 20 minutes per day to work on academics. For example, sports teams can incorporate math skills into competitions. The Jones Center can incorporate geometry into softball and kickball games while preschools could encourage colors and numbers aligned with different days or the week, and science experiments on summer water days. **Timing:** 20 minutes per day for the first day of summer activities, with goal of 30 minutes per day by final week of the first summer. Continue through year 3.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Improve schools and academic outcomes so students do not waste time at the beginning of each school year sliding backwards.
- » Prepare children for college and/or the workforce.
- » Make the community more attractive to new households with children.

Youth training coffee shop

Develop a coffee shop in the Downtown that provides opportunity youth the chance to learn and practice work skills in a supported, trauma-informed environment. The coffee shop will teach out-of-school or at-risk youth job skills and provide mental health services to set them on the path to self-sufficiency. This initiative would be modeled after similar successful programs such as Curt's Cafe in Evanston Illinois.

Actions Steps and Timing:

The youth training coffee shop is a multi-phased vocational training program. It is designed to promote workforce and educational achievement, build confidence, and improve life skills for young people who are homeless/at risk, experience disabilities, or face other challenges to mainstream employment. The training program includes:

- » A formal food and beverage training curriculum that offers youth a vocational "jump start" experience in a friendly neighborhood café.
- » A 4-week on-the-job experience that trains youth in all aspects of café service, customer service, barista skills, and safe food preparation skills.
- » A 4-week concurrent vocational workshop that assists youth to explore their unique vocational preferences, deconstruct barriers to employment or education, and plan their next step.

- » A stipend upon completion, and linkage to employment opportunities in food service in throughout the Chicagoland community.

Partners and Resources:

- » Jones Center
- » Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY)
- » City of Chicago Heights
- » Bloom High School
- » Prairie State College
- » OAI, inc.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Help at-risk youth overcome hurdles to employment.
- » Create a community gathering spot while providing career opportunities for at-risk youth.
- » Investment in youth.
- » Improved educational Outcomes.



CASE STUDY:

CURT'S CAFE, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Curt's Cafe is a nonprofit organization based in Evanston, Illinois. The name stands for Cultivating Unique Restaurant Training. CURT's provides hands-on training and life-skills coaching to young people who might easily become caught up in the criminal justice system.

Targeting those between the ages of 15 and 24, trainees start out washing dishes then learn how to use the register, take and fulfill orders and make coffee drinks and smoothies. They then move on to food preparation while completing a food handlers' sanitation course.

Emotional support and life skills opportunities are woven through the day, including a one-on-one counseling meeting with a social worker, art therapy and meditation. There are group classes on topics that include anger management, financial literacy, table etiquette and book clubs. Police come in and teach students about their rights, and judges come in and speak on other topics.

Source: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/highland-park/ct-hpn-curts-cafe-highland-park-tl-0808-20190805-qc3rx3j3hbbihfz6s26jieuy7q-story.html>



OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Priority Outcomes

- » Households are economically stable and self-sufficient.
- » Residents can easily access jobs, commercial services and other community amenities.

Framing the Challenge

Many Downtown/East Side households, especially public housing residents, lack the job skills and training needed to succeed in living wage jobs. There is an identified need to better connect unemployed and under-employed residents to job workforce centers, apprenticeship initiatives (jobs with training) and job opportunities. Residents seem to be unaware of the range of currently available resources. Job seekers routinely state that nearby industries do not have jobs suitable for them. Consequently, initiatives that empower workers to learn new skills and potentially contribute to local industries will be integral to the future of the community.

Unlike many economically challenged communities, the Downtown/East Side has a significant industrial employment base and is blessed with excellent public transportation. The neighborhood is home to a large Pace bus terminal and is a short ride to nearby regional Metra lines. Despite this, residents often struggle with understanding how to effectively use transportation amenities for their own benefit.

What Our Residents Have Told Us

Residents told us that there is a need for job workforce centers, apprenticeship initiatives and access to job opportunities. Residents also expressed their belief that nearby companies did not have jobs that matched their job skills and/or employment expectations.

The resident needs assessment survey explored a range of workforce development and employment issues. A substantial (42%) percentage of Sunrise/Mackler/Bergen respondents indicated that they were not working for pay, compared with 16% of neighborhood survey households. 34% of neighborhood survey households reported working more than 35 hours per week, compared with 16% of Sunrise/Mackler/Bergen survey households.

A significant percentage of the survey households indicated that there were adults in the household who were unemployed. The most common reasons why were that they are disabled, are caring for young children or another family member, are retired/senior citizen, or don't have transportation to get to available jobs. Just under half of survey respondents indicated that they or other adults in their household would be interested in job skills training. When asked what services would be most helpful, the top choices included 1) training in high-demand career fields, 2) job placement services, 3) basic computer skill training, 4) GED classes, and 5) on-the-job training programs.

Assets to Build On

Helping public housing residents gain the skills needed to succeed in the work place is a Housing Authority priority. Prairie State College is a strong and committed partner that provides a broad range of workforce training and career certificate programs. Six bus routes provide regional access from the Downtown Pace bus terminal, making accessing jobs for people without cars possible.

Measuring Progress

As we implement these strategies, progress can be tracked by metrics that include the number of residents transitioning out of public housing, the number of public housing residents employed, and the number of public housing residents enrolled in higher education or career certificate programs.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:

Coordinate efforts to improve the skills of the local workforce in order to meet the needs of current and future Chicago Heights employers and improve employment opportunities for residents.

Workforce development initiative

Prairie State College has a wide range of career certification programs that align with the needs of Chicago Heights' area employers, but these employers are not always aware of the training available. Similarly, residents tell us that they are unaware of the training opportunities available or that these classes are usually free to them. Completing these programs would increase job opportunities and lead to higher-paying jobs.

Partners and Resources:

- » Prairie State College
- » Housing Authority of Cook County
- » National Able
- » Local businesses
- » Private foundations
- » Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership

Actions Steps and Timing:

- » Organize *Workforce Wednesday* events to include testimonials from those who have changed their lives through career training at Prairie State College and presentations by local businesses to talk about hiring needs (i.e. If you get this certification, we can hire you and pay you more than you are making now).
- » Recruit Resident Advisors host *Workforce Wednesday* evening events and lead group outings providing transportation to Prairie State College. These events would be designed to encourage residents to learn about free career certificate training in high demand careers such as commercial drivers license, logistics and healthcare
- » Support Resident Advisors as they work with target housing residents to fill out the Prairie State enrollment forms and secure the necessary documents; educate Housing Authority tenants about the impact of income growth on their current rent payment.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Collaborations use area resources more effectively.
- » Rally residents to help each other and their shared community.
- » Improve the economic outcomes for residents and area businesses.



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: CHICAGO COOK WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (CCWP) is an umbrella organization operating the public workforce system in Cook County. CCWP combines federal and philanthropic resources to broaden the reach and impact of workforce development services for both employers and job seekers. As the largest non-profit workforce development system in the nation, CCWP has helped more than 60,000 individuals gain employment, collaborated with more than 2,000 employers, and administered more than \$300 million in federal and philanthropic funds. CCWP's network of more than 50 community-based organizations, 10 American Job Centers, and sector-driven workforce centers serves 132 municipalities.

One of these American job Centers is located in Chicago Heights at Prairie State College. Run by National Able!, the Chicago Heights location has programs designed to assist job seekers from all backgrounds, including the unemployed, career changers, military veterans, seniors, and aspiring IT professionals. The goal of the facility is to connect individuals to fulfilling careers; enhance career training through literacy training, GEDs, career coaching and much more.

Business - Prairie State College roundtable lunch and conference

Employers tell us that they often have no applicants from Chicago Heights and are not aware of the training classes available at Prairie State College. Prairie State has myriad career certification programs that align with the needs of Chicago Heights employers, but these two groups need to be better aligned to create a neighborhood of choice.

Partners and Resources:

- » City of Chicago Heights
- » Bloom High School
- » Prairie State College
- » OAI, inc.

Actions Steps and Timing:

- » Host a launching roundtable lunch & conference to merge employer & employee needs using the area's rich career-training resources at Prairie State College. Better-trained employees will be able to earn higher wages. **Timing:** 20 participants in the 2nd quarter of year 1.
- » Repeat the Roundtable gathering and events one time per quarter to celebrate successes and implement new ideas.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Better connect local businesses to Prairie State resources and career certification graduates.
- » Create new career opportunities for Downtown/East Side residents.



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: PRAIRIE STATE COLLEGE

Prairie State College (PSC) is a two-year community college offering associate degrees, technical and career certifications and adult, corporate and continuing education. Prairie State College offers degrees and certificates in more than 100 fields of study, providing the training needed for a good paying career. Prairie State is one of the 39 community college districts in Illinois and was the first Illinois community college to guarantee all credits will transfer to other Illinois colleges and universities.

Prairie State offers students in the Chicago Heights community the best of both worlds: the small school advantage combined with affordable tuition. Students can complete their first two years of college at PSC and transfer to a four-year college or university as a junior to complete their bachelor's degree. By starting at Prairie State College, students save thousands on tuition while obtaining an excellent education from dedicated faculty who want to be in the classroom.

Grow local teacher talent pool

Illinois has a shortage of schoolteachers and Downtown/East Side residents who are looking for a fulfilling career path could benefit. There are two scholarship programs available to help reduce the shortage while improving wages and a family's standard of living.

Actions Steps and Timing:

Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois (GYO) is a teacher training program that values diversity, the wisdom of community and providing the best possible education for all students. GYO's mission is to support community members to become certified teachers in their neighborhood schools in order to improve the educational outcomes for students. GYO was created to train and retain certified teachers of color committed to teaching in high needs schools in the communities where they live.

GYO candidates complete a traditional four-year college Bachelor's degree in education. Candidates who already have a Bachelor's degree, complete a master's in education or take the additional courses required to earn their teaching certification. GYO candidates must satisfy all the state requirements to become licensed teachers. GYO is not an alternative

certification program. GYO candidates receive financial, academic, and emotional supports to assist them in completing their degrees. In return for the support provided by the program, graduates commit to teaching at least five years in a high-needs school or in a high-needs teaching position.

Recruitment and selection begin at the community level. Having a demonstrable commitment to the community is a key requirement for admission to the program. Once admitted, candidates are required to engage in community work, to attend monthly cohort meetings and participate in leadership, organizing and advocacy trainings. The goal is for GYO candidates to become teachers who are leaders inside and outside the classroom.

Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker recently announced a \$3M Gateways Scholarship Program, an individual-based scholarship opportunity for practitioners working in early care and education. The program provides financial assistance for early childhood education and child development (ECE/CD) coursework and degrees offered through participating colleges and universities, dependent on available funding.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Improved educational opportunities.
- » Households are economically stable and self-sufficient.
- » Provide qualified teachers to satisfy demand.
- » Reduce teacher turnover.
- » Improve the educational standards of teachers working in Chicago Heights schools.
- » Increase career pathways for CN residents.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY:

Engage residents through information campaigns and programs so that they are aware of the resources available as they work to improve their lives.

★ EnVision Center Priority Project

HUD's EnVision Centers initiative is designed to support the delivery of integrated services from philanthropic organizations, private industry and all levels of government in order to increase the opportunity for low-income families to achieve self-sufficiency. The mission of the initiative is to provide communities with centralized hubs for support in the areas of 1) economic empowerment, 2) educational advancement, 3) health and wellness, and 4) character and leadership.

Performance Metrics:

- » December 2020 EnVision Center Grand Opening
- » Public housing resident enrollment in available certified training programs

Partners and Resources:

- » Metropolitan Family Services
- » Illinois Action for Children
- » Chicago Heights Public Library
- » Illinois Department of Human Services' childcare programs
- » Illinois Student Assistance Commission
- » Prairie State College
- » Forest Preserves of Cook County
- » Cook County Health & Hospital Systems
- » National Able
- » Homewood-Flossmoor High School (tutoring program)
- » YMCA of Metro Chicago's Youth Safety and Violence Prevention initiative (YSVP)
- » Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
- » US Forest Service, Youth Conservation Corps (YCC)
- » HUD/HUBZone
- » HUD, Self-help Homeownership Opportunity Program (SHOP)
- » US Department of Labor, Youth Build Job training
- » US Department of Labor, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)



Action Steps and Timing:

The EnVision Center will be located at the Housing Authority's Golden Towers campus. Two of the towers have recently been renovated and include computer rooms, fitness facilities and training rooms. These community spaces will serve as the temporary EnVision Center. A third building at Golden Towers is undergoing renovation and will house EnVision Center programming as well as housing specialists and program directors. This building will be the hub of all EnVision activities. The EnVision Center will accommodate career training classes, GED classes, health and fitness seminars, mentoring meetings, tutoring services and more - all of which will empower Housing Authority tenants and other eligible residents to progress in each of EnVision's four pillars: 1) economic empowerment, 2) educational advancement 3) health and wellness, and 4) character and leadership. Additional EnVision classes will be held at the Housing Authority's South Suburban family sites to ensure that those without transportation can participate. These classes and meetings will occur daily when the EnVision Center opens. After the first quarter, the Housing Authority will assess which services are most in demand, how more people can be reached, which services are missing from the playbook, and how to provide the additional services that are needed.

The EnVision Center mission aligns perfectly with the Housing Authority's recently launched website www.bewell.thehacc.org/

This website will complement the EnVision Center, tying together the efforts at the Housing Authority's family site satellite offices and the Golden Towers campus. Dividing life into three phases - early childhood, school years, and adult- the housing authority will provide a comprehensive guide to resources related.

- » Economic Empowerment: career training, Section 3 and apprenticeship opportunities, financial management, Family Self-Sufficiency, and summer jobs.
- » Educational Advancement: educational videos to stimulate baby brain development and other parenting tips, Head Start locator link, college scholarship and FAFSA application information.
- » Health and Wellness: immunization schedules with live updates from the Center for Disease Control, detailed information about public health clinics, and mental health resources.
- » Character and Leadership: Resources can be found throughout beWELL including afterschool programs, summer camps, summer jobs, career training, the Family Self-Sufficiency program, financial management, and inspirational videos of successful clients.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Households are economically stable and self-sufficient.
- » Neighborhood-based self-sufficiency resources are used.
- » Health care access is improved.
- » Residents can easily access jobs.



Self-sufficiency programming

This project builds on the programs currently offered by a wide variety of service providers and would include money management workshops, events designed to improve access to health care (insurance, provider options, transportation) and connecting residents to low-cost or free targeted employment training programs.

CEDA and the Housing Authority of Cook County have effective programs for self-sufficiency that could be beneficial to Choice Neighborhood families. Successful graduates of these programs will be encouraged to store the personal benefits they have enjoyed through these programs.

CEDA's, Family Support and Community Engagement (FSACE) team provide case management that helps stabilize and support Suburban Cook County families and individuals on a path to self-sufficiency through a range of services including:

- » Health & Nutrition: Vision and Dental Care and Family Nutrition Program
- » Employment Services: job skills enhancements
- » Rental Services: household budgeting and financial assistance
- » Education: scholarships for post-secondary education
- » Transportation: auto repair and public transportation vouchers

In the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program for Housing Authority of Cook County, clients create a 5-year plan to self-sufficiency.

Program elements include:

- » Rental increases due to increased income are saved for clients in an escrow account until graduation
- » Case management
- » Employment counseling
- » Transportation assistance
- » Educational counseling
- » Job and computer training
- » Referrals for child care assistance
- » Substance/alcohol abuse treatment or counseling
- » Household skill training
- » Homeownership counseling
- » Credit counseling and credit repair

Partners: and Resources

- » Housing Authority of Cook County, Family Self-Sufficiency team
- » CEDA, Family Support and Community Engagement (FSACE) team
- » Jones Center
- » Prairie State College
- » National Able

Goals and Outcomes:

- » One family in targeted housing to achieve self-sufficiency within five years.
- » Two families in the Downtown/East Side, but not in targeted housing, achieve self-sufficiency within five years.

Public transit awareness campaign

Work with Pace and service providers to add public transportation routes to all marketing materials so that residents can find inexpensive transportation options.

Actions Steps and Timing:

- » Promote the availability of existing public transportation options that allow residents to get anywhere in the region to access jobs, school, shopping/health care and meet other family needs. For example, Downtown/East Side residents can commute to Chicago's central business district in 1 hour and 18 minutes using one bus one train.
- » Create a text hotline for residents to request revised or new PACE routes to improve access to social service providers and job opportunities.
- » Provide transportation education at all workforce training and school locations.
- » Increase awareness of the Google maps public transportation feature as well as other transportation smart phone apps.

Partners and Resources:

- » Pace
- » City of Chicago Heights

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Transportation assets improve mobility.
- » Broaden the geographic boundaries for resident job searches.



OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Priority Outcomes

- » Children, youth, and adults are physically and mentally healthy.
- » Access to health care is improved by reducing social inequities in income, wealth, power and status and taking a “health in all policies” approach.

Framing the Challenge

Good health is an important contributing factor to the ability to get and maintain employment or be successful in school. There are several facets to health including chronic illness, mental health, fitness levels, and a healthy diet. These are influenced by the presence or lack of access to medical services, safe places for activity and recreation, and availability of affordable nutritious food.

The closure of St. James Hospital in Chicago Heights was a major loss for the community. Residents now must travel farther for emergency services and Chicago Heights lost a major employer.

What Our Residents Have Told Us

Most participants in the resident needs assessment survey rated their health as good or excellent. About a quarter of survey respondents indicated that they went to Aunt Martha’s (a Federally-qualified health center) for care. A private doctor in either Chicago Heights or another community was listed by 31% of target housing and 40% of neighborhood survey households. A hospital emergency room or calling 911 was identified by 4% of target housing and 7% of neighborhood households as the primary way to access health care. A strong majority of survey participants reported that all household members had seen a doctor in the past year for a physical exam/checkup. Slightly lower, but still strong majorities of survey households reported seeing a dentist in the past 12 months for preventive dental care.

Most survey respondents reported that no members of the household had difficulty accessing health care services. Where access to health care was an issue, adult women were the most likely to be affected; children under age 18 were the least likely. The top three chronic health conditions reported by each survey group are high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes.

During the past two years, difficulty in obtaining vision services or prescriptions due to cost was reported by 21% of target housing and 25% of neighborhood residents; 19% of target housing and 18% of neighborhood survey households reported that they or people they knew needed

mental health services, but did not get them due to cost of availability; and 10% of target housing and 18% of neighborhood survey respondents reported that they or people they knew could not access needed substance abuse counseling/treatment because of cost or availability.

When asked what would make them more likely to exercise, having a gym in the neighborhood or “a walking/running path near my home” were top survey response choices. However, 12% of target housing and 18% of neighborhood survey participants indicated that nothing would encourage more exercise. Several respondents identified improved neighborhood safety as a factor that might make it more likely that they would exercise.

Neighborhood resident survey respondents were less likely to be affected by food insecurity, with 29% of survey households reporting that they had enough money for food every month, compared with 22% of Sunrise/Mackler/Bergen target housing survey respondents; 25% of target housing respondents reported that they lacked enough money for food almost every month, with another 33% reporting that this was an issue in some months, but not every month. In contrast, 11% of neighborhood survey households reported that they lacked money for food almost every month; another 25% lacked enough money for food in some months, but not every month.



Assets to Build On

Although St. James Hospital has closed, there are still a number of medical service providers and social service providers based in Downtown Chicago Heights. In addition to a full service grocery store, located on Chicago Road immediately south of Downtown, there are several food pantry locations in the Downtown/ East Side Choice Neighborhood that partner with the Greater Chicago Food Depository.



Measuring Progress

As we implement our strategies our progress can be tracked by metrics such as the number of neighborhood medical care facilities available to serve neighborhood residents, number of available and affordable recreational facilities, percentage of residents with health insurance and options for accessing affordable, nutritious food.

HEALTH STRATEGY:

Insure continued access to health care services, facilities to promote healthy lifestyles, and affordable, nutritious food to address food insecurity challenges.

★ Healthy Lifestyle Campaign Priority Project

Work with residents to encourage diet and exercise that prevent chronic illnesses common in the community such as diabetes and high blood pressure. The Healthy Lifestyle Campaign will be accomplished through a multi-pronged approach that addresses making nutritious food choices and engaging in physical activity.

Partners and Resources:

- » University of Illinois Extension: Nutrition Education Programs
- » Common Threads
- » Chicago Food Depository
- » The Jones Center
- » Catholic Charities
- » Chicago Heights Park District
- » Cook County Public Health & Hospitals
- » Illinois Public Health Institute
- » Housing Authority of Cook County
- » City of Chicago Heights

Action Steps and Timing:

- » Promote healthy eating with Common Threads and Illinois Extension nutrition educational programming in the Sunrise Community Room and at the Jones Center.
 - Family cooking classes led by Common Threads
 - Chef-guided tour of a local grocery store with focus on how to economically buy healthy foods organized by Common Threads
- » Marketing campaign and field trips to make residents aware of food pantry locations including:
 - Food pantry across from Prairie State College
 - Weekly at the Jones Center
 - Regularly at Respond Now
 - Local farmers' markets during the spring and summer months that allow the use of SNAP, and doubling a shopper's SNAP dollars when buying fruits and vegetables
- » Work with the Illinois Public Health Institute and CDC guidelines to encourage good nutrition with organizations such as the Jones Center, Chicago Park District and Prairie State College.

- » Fitness and exercise campaign coordinated with the grand opening of the new park across from the Lincoln-Gavin School.
 - Have high school and grade school physical education teachers regularly lead families in active games during summer and fall weekends.
 - Work with community organizations and schools to increase awareness of the need for physical activity using guidelines from Illinois Public Health Institute and the CDC.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Children, youth, and adults are physically and mentally healthy.
- » Food security is the norm.
- » Neighborhood based services and amenities are used.

Urgent/emergency care center

This effort involves working to recruit an urgent care center or similar facility to fill the service gaps caused by the closure of St. James Hospital so that emergency services/immediate care is easily accessible to Downtown/East Side residents.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Children, youth, and adults are physically and mentally healthy.
- » Health care access is improved.

Mobile grocery store

This project involves developing a way to regularly bring produce and other nutritious food options to neighborhood sites to address food insecurity. There are a number of models in use throughout the country that will be explored to determine the best fit for the Downtown/East Side Choice Neighborhood.

Goals and Outcomes:

- » Children, youth, and adults are physically and mentally healthy.
- » Food security is the norm.



CASE STUDY:

ROLLIN' GROCER, KANSAS CITY, MO

Rollin' Grocer is a Kansas City-based organization that supplies fresh food to under-privileged "food desert" communities in Kansas City.

Founded in 2016, Rollin' Grocer currently has 20 employees and operates a 250 square-foot vehicle that makes stops at various food deserts throughout the metro area, selling fresh and affordable food a short walking distance from those who need it. Rollin' Grocer currently carries over 760 food products and serves up to 100 customers per day.

Rollin' Grocer makes stops in multiple neighborhoods. In addition to low-income neighborhoods, the truck frequents retirement communities located in the urban core, university areas where students don't have

a grocery store within walking distance and churches, so that members can pick up groceries after attending services.

Rollin' Grocer is able to accept all major credit cards, cash, and EBT, which allows them to serve individuals from all income levels.

Rollin' Grocer is currently expanding and hopes to add as many trucks as is needed to give the food insecure populations in Kansas City access to the healthy food they need to thrive.

"We are interested in having the type of store that people choose to shop at—not because they have to, but because they actually want to."

Source: <https://www.startlandnews.com/2017/05/bringing-grub-kc-food-deserts-rollin-grocer-expand-impact-contest-win/>

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/gvkk9m/this-mobile-grocery-store-wants-to-eliminate-food-deserts-in-kansas-city