



## Partnership for Health: A Decade of Community-University Engagement

The mission of the Community Alliance for Research & Engagement (CARE) at Yale School of Public Health is to improve health in New Haven. CARE was established in 2007 to identify solutions to health challenges through community action research. CARE promotes the prevention of chronic disease by focusing on social, environmental, and behavioral risk factors. For nearly ten years, CARE has collaborated with residents from six low-income neighborhoods; students, teachers and staff from 12 New Haven Public Schools; and with numerous community partners across the city to create change in the places where we live, work, and play. In this collaborative work, CARE is proud to contribute toward important initiatives – while tracking important changes in our community's health.

### ONE COMMUNITY

Created **lasting partnerships** and contributed to **sustainable infrastructure**.

**3600** residents in six neighborhoods and **1800** students in 12 New Haven Public Schools had **voices** heard, completing in-person surveys about their health and health of our community.

**60+** jobs provided to area residents to collect research data.

**10** community and school gardens built.

**6** miles of urban trails were marked in Fair Haven.

**400** families screened for SNAP benefits.

**150,000** people visited Big Food, an exhibition at the Peabody Museum about food, health and obesity

Contributed to establishment of a new City of New Haven position – **Food System Director** – focused on food, hunger, and health.

Supported implementation of the first **comprehensive Health Education Curriculum** throughout New Haven Public Schools.

The community reports **positive health changes** in neighborhoods, schools and across the city.

- Residents report: improvements in their neighborhoods that make it easier to lead a healthy lifestyle; feeling safer; more food security; higher rates of insurance and more.
- Students in schools with support for strong nutrition policies sustained healthier weight; we documented important associations between health and academic achievement in math and reading.

## THE NEXT DECADE

CARE is partnering with Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) to enhance ongoing efforts to improve the health of residents. CARE is moving aspects of its community engagement work to SCSU: combining research strength at the Yale School of Public Health with the outreach capabilities of students, faculty, and staff from SCSU's School of Health and Human Services. This partnership represents a powerful next step in the evolution of CARE by engaging with a local state university to drive deeper change into New Haven. The Yale School of Public Health will remain as the central hub for CARE's research activities, with a focus on data analysis from its New Haven Public Schools and neighborhood health surveys. Yale will also guide research design, complementing SCSU as it builds infrastructure, programs, research capacity, and funding to implement and sustain community health initiatives from within the School of Health and Human Services.

## IN NEW HAVEN NEIGHBORHOODS

Communities most at-risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease also experience structural barriers within the built environment that prevent people from engaging in healthy behaviors – unsafe streets for walking and biking; lack of access to affordable, healthy foods; limited recreational resources and more. CARE has been working with residents at the neighborhood level to address some of these barriers to health.

## Research

### **Completed more than 3600 surveys in six low-income New Haven neighborhoods.**

Every three years, CARE has conducted a survey to track neighborhood health, hiring local community members to complete door-to-door surveys with residents in six of New Haven's low-income neighborhoods: Dixwell, Fair Haven, Hill North, Newhallville, West River/Dwight, and West Rock/West Hills. Households were randomly selected (like flipping a coin) from a list of addresses. In 2009, we completed 1,205 interviews; 1,298 in 2012; and 1,189 in 2015. Seventy percent of residents approached agreed to participate, answering questions about their health, diet, exercise, smoking habits, and neighborhood safety. CARE is dedicated to rapidly disseminating research results directly back to the community. After each survey cycle, CARE published reports and hosted large community forums immediately after completing data collection. For community reports about this work, please go to: [tinyurl.com/care-reports](http://tinyurl.com/care-reports)



### **Partnered with the DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey.**

With input from Healthier Greater New Haven and others, DataHaven and CARE formed a partnership to develop and simultaneously conduct the DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey in 2012 (>1200 residents in 13 cities and towns in the Greater New Haven region) and 2015 (>16,000 respondents across Connecticut). Coupled with CARE's survey, these efforts collectively represent the largest and most comprehensive surveys ever conducted in our region and serve as the Community Health Needs Assessment for Yale New Haven Health. The purpose is to begin a story about opportunities and challenges that face the metropolitan region where we live, work, study, and play.

### **Conducted asset mapping.**

In 2009, CARE collected data about the built environment as it relates to health in the same six neighborhoods, documenting features such as access to nutritious foods (e.g., stores and restaurants), street safety (e.g., sidewalks and crosswalks), and green space (e.g., parks and gardens). CARE hired local high school students to conduct the mapping through *Youth@Work*, a city program that provides work readiness development for urban youth. In seven weeks, youth collectively walked over 3,000 miles and collected nearly 500 data points! Employing youth as community health workers to collect data greatly enriched the community research process and offered many advantages. A documentary about the project was produced by the youth: [3,000 Miles](#) and featured in the [American Journal of Public Health](#).

“Our longstanding partnership with CARE influenced the mission of the West River Neighborhood Services Corp. West River aspires to become “a caring and green neighborhood”. CARE’s work and presence – sharing the results of multiple public health surveys, providing seed money for pilot programs to increase healthy food access, and *always* having a representative at our monthly meetings – showed real investment and commitment. They listened to us; we listened to them. Thanks to CARE, West River is more savvy about what being healthy means. We now know that the neighborhood we aspire to become cannot happen unless there is individual and community well-being. The relationships created and work we did together endure.”

~Ann Green, West River Neighborhood Services Corp.

### **Provided jobs for 60 New Haven-area residents and youth to conduct this research.**

CARE hired and trained local community members to collect data. We conducted intensive trainings on research and data collection. The temporary jobs provided research experience and built skills to obtain future positions. Surveyors enhanced outreach, gained trust, and paved the way for rapid survey completion.

### **Published 12 articles to date on this neighborhood-related research.**

This includes research on community organizing, race and place, impact of stigma, risk factors for chronic disease and mental health. A list of publications is at [tinyurl.com/care-pubs](https://tinyurl.com/care-pubs).

## **Action**

CARE’s team of community organizers has worked with residents from the six neighborhoods to strengthen local capacity, ownership, and sustainability around a culture of health. Most importantly, CARE is guided by community organizing principles to train and mobilize residents around health-related issues important to their neighborhoods.

### **CARE partners with neighborhood groups to identify health priorities, access resources, implement activities and track results. Catalyzing projects focus directly on the built environment and include:**

- Supporting ten community and school gardens:
  - Amistad, Casa Otoñal, Field of Greens, and Thomas Chapel Community Prayer gardens in the Hill
  - Clinton Avenue School and Community Garden in Fair Haven
  - Little Red Hen Garden in West River
  - Westville Manor Garden, Brookside Garden, and Brennan-Rogers School Garden in West Rock
  - Bristol Street Community Garden and Constance Baker Motley Garden in Dixwell
- Increasing access to Farmers’ Markets by facilitating the implementation or expansion of markets in Fair Haven, the Hill, West River, and West Rock.
- Catalyzing the creation of a new monthly stop for the CT Food Bank’s mobile pantry program in West Rock.
- Developing nearly six miles of permanently marked walking trails in Fair Haven.
- Redeveloping key intersections to implement traffic calming measures in West River to improve access to neighborhood parks.
- Improving access to parks and recreation facilities.
- Contributing to the Newhallville Community Resilience Team, working to address community violence and increase social cohesion.
- Supported traditional public health projects targeting individual behavioral change, such as the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program in the Hill and various cooking classes and exercise/sports programs.



**Conducted SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) outreach and screenings to increase access to nutritious foods for low-income families.** Outreach and screenings were offered at emergency food program sites and other community locations. Through these efforts, staff reached more than 400 clients, screened 340 households and estimated to have enrolled at least 212 households.

**Launched the New Haven Healthy Corner Store Initiative** with four stores in 2010-2012, bringing fresh produce and healthier snacks to neighborhoods.

**Offered Quit & Win programs** in 2011 and 2012 to encourage smokers to quit; more than 250 residents attempted to quit smoking.

**Trained Youth Health Advisors**, an initiative to develop leadership skills and engage youth in the health priorities with people in their faith community.

**Offered SisterTalk, a faith-based program designed by and for African-American and Black women** to address healthy lifestyle, weight management, and related concerns in two local churches.

## IN NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CARE, along with the Rudd Center for Food Policy (now at the University of Connecticut), developed a strong partnership with the New Haven Public School District. Because schools provide concentrated contact with children, they are a model environment to facilitate health and support nutrition education and physical activity.

### Research

*Health for Achievement* is a 5-year study supported by the National Institutes of Health that examines the impact of health on academic achievement. With its partners, CARE has examined school-based policy interventions – through the district’s School Wellness Policies – focused on improving nutrition and physical activity. We use information collected from students, teachers, administrators and parents in 12 New Haven Public Schools to develop new policies and programs, raise awareness, and motivate positive health practices. Results have been disseminated locally and nationally, aiming to educate our communities and encourage better health for all students.



Through *Health for Achievement*, we have collected surveys and physical measures (height, weight, blood pressure, waist circumference) of more than **1,800 middle school students** to examine their physical health, health behaviors, school and neighborhood environments. A randomized controlled trial in these 12 schools was conducted to support implementation of school wellness policies to improve the school health environment and reduce obesity and obesity-related risk factors among students across middle school (grades 5 through 8).

**Published 15 articles to date on this school-related research.** This includes research on risk and protective factors for obesity and elevated blood pressure, use of the emergency room, smoking, bullying, breakfast consumption, sugar-sweetened beverages/energy drinks, and the association between health and academic achievement. A list of publications is in the at [tinyurl.com/care-pubs](http://tinyurl.com/care-pubs).

### Action

Purchased and rolled out the comprehensive **Michigan Model Health Education Curriculum** throughout New Haven Public Schools. Supporting colleagues in the New Haven Public Schools, we played an important role in implementing comprehensive health education (Kindergarten through grade 12) for the first time in the District.

**Started Health Heroes** in New Haven Public Schools, inspiring more than 700 students, 280 families and 85 staff to take up health challenges.

**Implemented Weight Watchers for teachers and staff in 11 schools:** 148 participants collectively shed nearly 1,000 pounds.

**Created infrastructure** to sustain healthy schools by implementing school health policies and a Physical Activity & Wellness program in 16 schools and enriching school environments by purchasing health resources, sports equipment, and books.

**Created “learning labs” in cafeterias** at three schools, including monitors with health messaging and a school-specific, health-themed mural.



**Hired 12 Parent Advocates** to strengthen parent engagement in schools.

**Implemented the ‘Rethink Your Drink’ campaign** in six schools, CARE’s version of the CDC’s 6-week awareness campaign focused on getting students to drink more water and less sugary-sweetened beverages.

**Nearly 200 students completed the ‘Limit Screen Time’ health challenge**, designed to address one of the major findings of CARE’s school study.

**Implemented Mighty Milers, a fitness and character-building program, reaching over 500 students** in the 6th grade physical education classes of six schools. Students completed a “marathon of miles” over 14 weeks by running or walking until their marathon goal was reached.

**Brought Zamzee, an interactive online physical activity program, to nearly 100 students in six schools.** This four-month challenge targeted 6th grade students, who used a special pedometer to track their physical movement.

## COMMUNITY WIDE ACTION

CARE played a leading role in **New Haven Food Policy Council** to advocate for food policy changes and was instrumental in helping the Council reach many goals. Key accomplishments include:

- **New Haven Food Action Plan:** a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for the city of New Haven to improve access to healthy food, the food business economy, and cooking and food education. The New Haven Board of Alders officially endorsed the plan in October 2013.
- **Food System Director position:** secured a commitment of **\$115,000** from the Kendall Foundation and additional funding from the Board of Alders to fund this new city position.
- **Comprehensive Plan:** submitted set of recommendations for incorporation into the City’s 10-year plan to codify the importance of fostering and promoting a strong local food system.
- **Commodity Supplemental Food Program:** lobbied the CT congressional delegation to advocate for funding from the federal government to support the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. In 2014 we were successful in securing **\$2.8 million** for the state to implement this program, bringing staple foods to approximately **2,400 hungry seniors**.
- **Summer Meals Program:** In conjunction with End Hunger CT, coordinated and mobilized the Summer Blitz since 2014, a city-wide canvassing event to expand the reach and participation of New Haven Public School’s Summer Meals Program. As a result, enrollment in the 2014 program was up nearly 30% over the previous year. This led to a **\$50,000** grant to the New Haven Public Schools from the National League of Cities and the Food Action Research Center to expand the program.
- **Food Advocate Training:** In 2014, received funding from the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven to offer a stipend training program, empowering 12 residents who receive food assistance to advocate for better policies.
- **Witnesses to Hunger:** In 2014, organized a public event at New Haven City Hall featuring photos with personal stories that demonstrate the need for programs and policies to help move people out of poverty, a collaboration between End Hunger CT, the Drexel School of Public Health and Representative Rosa DeLauro’s office.



**Key partner in Healthier Greater New Haven Partnership**, working with Yale New Haven Hospital and more than two dozen other partners to conduct our community health needs and assets assessments and to use the evidence we collected to guide the development and implementation of the New Haven Community Health Improvement Plan.

**Curated Big Food: Health, Culture and the Evolution of Eating**, an exhibition at the Peabody Museum about food, health and obesity, that reached >150,000 people and impacted food choice and health, broke records in museum attendance and supported spirited community discourse and programs throughout the year.



## EXPERT CONSULTATION

**CARE was often called upon by organizations to provide consultation services to research and evaluate projects.**

### Access Health CT Evaluation

Carried out in-person surveys, telephone surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews to learn about the consumer experience of underserved populations using Access Health CT (AHCT) – the state’s health insurance marketplace. The evaluation revealed that in-person assistance was the most helpful and effective way to receive and use information from AHCT.

### Health in Your Hands

Health in Your Hands, an initiative created to support community-based programs that address the increasing obesity crisis, was evaluated for health behavior change. Health in Your Hands programs reached more than 1500 people and helped participants achieve healthy weight loss goals, reduce hypertension, change eating and exercise behaviors inside and outside of the home.

### Common Ground High School

Provided guidance to Common Ground High School’s Environmental Education Programs to improve survey infrastructure that measure’s impact of environmental attitudes and behaviors, as well as healthy eating and active living outcomes. Designed survey instruments for their K-8<sup>th</sup> programs *Nature Year* and *Kids Unplugged* to evaluate program effectiveness and influence on positive peer relations and environmental knowledge.

### National League of Cities

Designed, built, and implemented a national survey on behalf of the National League of Cities to determine what cities/municipalities across the country are doing to connect children to nature. Analyzed responses from more than 110 community and city stakeholders to identify best practices, innovative ideas, and areas needing to improve child access to nature and environmental resources.

## FUNDING

CARE has been successful in securing more than \$7.5 million from diverse funding sources. CARE has remained steadfast in directing resources back into the community in many ways: **awarding grants to neighborhood groups, filling jobs with local staff, contributing staff resources directly into community projects, and sharing resources with community based funding partners.**

- 2007-2019**      **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** Prevention Research Center: Meeting Community Needs across the Prevention Spectrum Identify and support research in health promotion & disease prevention
- 2011-2017**      **National Institute of Child and Human Development:** School Wellness Policy: RCT to Implement and Evaluate Impact on Childhood Obesity in collaboration with New Haven Public Schools and the Rudd Center on Food Policy and Obesity
- 2008-2015**      **The Donaghue Foundation:** Community Interventions for Health
- 2012, 2015**      **Yale New Haven Hospital:** Community Health Needs Assessment
- 2015**            **National League of Cities (JPB Foundation):** Cities Promoting Access to Nature
- 2014**            **Center for Business/Environment at Yale, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies**  
Natural Environment and Human Health: Is increasing access to the natural environment to improve health a viable strategy for reducing health-related costs for businesses?
- 2013-2014**      **Universal Healthcare, Connecticut Health and Donaghue Foundations:** Evaluation of the Early Consumer Experience Enrolling into Access Health CT
- 2012-2014**      **Newman's Own Foundation:** Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach Project
- 2010-2013**      **The Kresge Foundation, Emerging and Promising Practices:** A Comprehensive Multi-Sector Approach to Improve Community Health
- 2011-2012**      **The Aetna Foundation:** Childhood Obesity: Exploring the Role of Environmental Context on Risk Behaviors and Health Outcomes

## GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION

**This decade of work would not have been possible without the endless support of our community and university partners. Some key partners include:**

Amistad Catholic Worker House  
Chatham Square Neighborhood Association  
City Seed  
City of New Haven: Board of Alders; City Plan Department;  
Community Services Administration; Department of Public Health, Parks and Recreation; Transportation, Traffic and Parking  
Common Ground  
Community Foundation for Greater New Haven  
Connecticut Mental Health Center  
Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center  
DataHaven  
End Hunger CT!  
Fair Haven Community Health Center  
Family Resource Center - Brennan-Rogers School  
New Haven Family Alliance  
New Haven Farms

New Haven Food Policy Council  
New Haven Land Trust  
New Haven Public Schools  
New Haven Public Schools District Wellness Committee  
Newhallville Community Resilience Team  
Thomas Chapel  
United Way of Greater New Haven  
University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity  
Urban Resources Initiative  
West River Neighborhood Services Corporation  
Yale New Haven Hospital  
*Yale University:* Center for Business and the Environment, School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, School of Public Health, Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program

**We also appreciate the years of service given by CARE's Steering Committee. Over the years, members have included:**

Laurie Bridger, Fair Haven Community Health Center  
Althea Marshall Brooks, New Haven Public Schools  
Luz Catarineau Colville, Amistad Catholic Worker House  
Paul Cleary, Yale School of Public Health\*  
Lee Cruz, Community Foundation of Greater New Haven,  
Chatham Square Neighborhood Association\*  
Maria Damiani, New Haven Health Department  
Roberta Friedman, UConn Rudd Center  
Ann Greene, West River Neighborhood Services Corporation\*  
Mary Alice Lee, Connecticut Voices  
Georgina Lucas, Yale University Robert Wood Johnson Clinical  
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Stephanie O'Malley, Yale University, Dept. of Psychiatry  
Catherine McCaslin, New Haven Public Schools  
Augusta Mueller, Yale New Haven Health \*  
Marcella Nuñez Smith, Yale School of Medicine\*  
Lois Sadler, Yale School of Nursing  
Martha Swartz, Yale School of Nursing  
Stephen Updegrove, New Haven Public Schools\*  
Burchell Valldejuli, Mactivity\*

*\*current member*

**CARE owes its accomplishments to dedicated staff who have contributed to the development of research and related activities.**

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