

2019-2024

# HEALTHIER TOGETHER

Celebrating  
Five Years Through  
Community Voices



Children's Hospital  
of Philadelphia®  
Office of Community Impact





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Our Vision for the Future



## Healthier Together: Celebrating Five Years Through Community Voices

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) created Healthier Together to address the broader, nonmedical factors often linked to health disparities in West and Southwest Philadelphia. The initiative responded to the most pressing needs identified in the 2019 Regional Community Health Needs Assessment: housing, hunger, trauma and poverty.

For the past five years, we pursued evidence-based strategies and promoted collaborations among CHOP and community residents, local organizations, government agencies and philanthropy to address health where it starts: in the community. We expanded our reach to more than 15,000 individuals, developed trusted partnerships, improved neighborhood conditions and supported the growth of the local economy by investing over \$20 million in West and Southwest

Philadelphia. This strategy positioned us to advance our mission, and we are incredibly proud of our accomplishments to date.

At Healthier Together, we believe in the power of community stories to inspire change and illustrate our collective efforts. In this spirit, we invite you to explore the inspiring narratives from our community. They highlight the commitment, partnership and impact of our work. These voices showcase the resilience, creativity and dedication of families, local partners and stakeholders who are united in the mission to create a healthier future for our children.

Through these stories, you’ll learn firsthand how we are making a difference — whether it’s through increasing access to nutritious food, improving living conditions, offering trauma support or redeveloping schoolyards.



“ Over the past five years, Healthier Together has developed many innovative solutions to improve the health of children in our community. Thanks to this landmark program, children and families are living happier, healthier lives — and their futures are brighter than ever. ”

— Madeline Bell, President and CEO, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

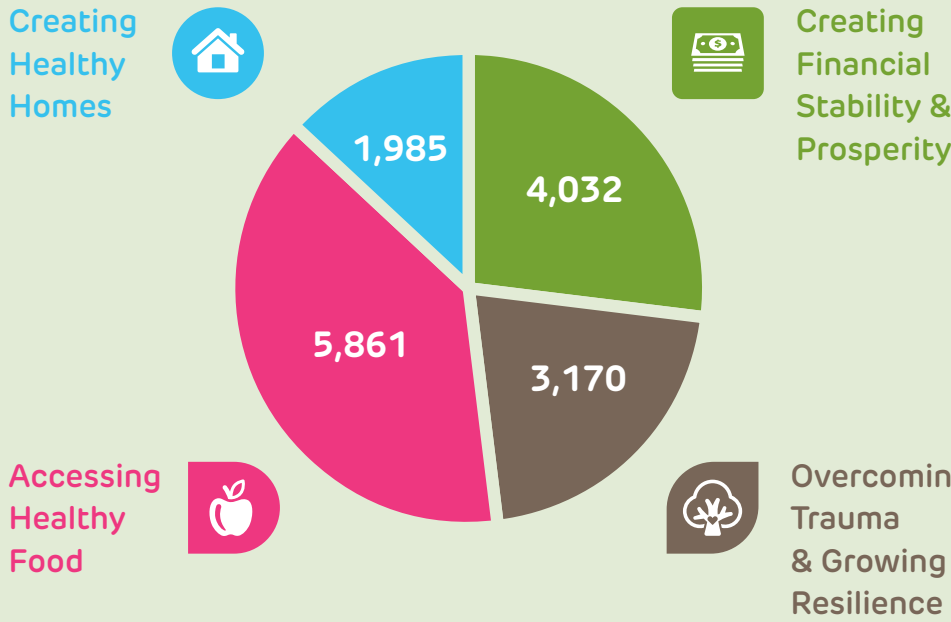
Each story reflects the unique experiences of our community and underscores the importance of our collective efforts.

Join us in celebrating our five-year milestone and discovering how we can continue supporting and uplifting our West and Southwest Philadelphia community. We hope you get inspired by the change we are fostering and excited for the future of Healthier Together.

Healthier Together's Impact at a Glance



Number of individuals reached by area of focus:



Creating  
HEALTHY  
HOMES





### Approach

Housing security and quality impacts our overall health and well-being. Inadequate housing exposes individuals to unsanitary and unstable conditions. Healthier Together addresses this challenge by repairing the homes of children who have severe asthma to reduce triggers; and by enhancing access to legal support to prevent eviction and improve housing stability. This allows families and communities to thrive.

### Impact



**200**

homes repaired to reduce asthma triggers



**8,000**

hours of legal services provided at no cost to CHOP families



**1,700**

legal cases resolved to keep families in stable and healthy homes

### Partners

CHOP Center for Health Equity, CHOP Medical Legal Partnership, Rebuilding Together Philadelphia, Habitat for Humanity, Community Legal Services, Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation



### Home Repairs End Naomi's Asthma Flares

# A FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE

The Community Asthma Prevention Program Plus (CAPP+) Home Repairs Program is a partnership between CHOP and Rebuilding Together Philadelphia that provides free repairs to CHOP patient homes to eliminate asthma triggers.

When Juanisa's 1-year-old daughter Naomi was struggling with asthma in early 2021, the family's pediatrician at CHOP Primary Care, Haverford referred them to CHOP's Community Asthma Prevention Program (CAPP). Despite their asthma management and prevention efforts, Naomi's asthma still remained tough to control. It wasn't until the family got connected to CAPP+ that they realized why.

A specially trained community health worker from CAPP+ visited the family's home to identify asthma triggers.

The home visit led to the repair of the following hidden problems:

- Dust in the carpet in the upstairs hallway and Naomi's bedroom
- Leaky pipes and mold behind the walls of the bathroom next to Naomi's room
- Dampness and mold in the basement playroom and bathroom

More than 200 homes have been renovated through the CAPP+ Program to reduce asthma triggers in the homes of children with severe asthma. Ever since CAPP+ and Rebuilding Together collaborated to remove mold, make repairs to stop water intrusion, install air vents in bathrooms and the kitchen, and put a whole-house dehumidifier in the basement of Juanisa's West Philadelphia home, the difference in Naomi's health has been remarkable. Naomi, now 4, no longer has a chronic wheeze and cough, and there have been no ER visits or hospitalizations.





“CAPP+ has been a blessing. I’m thrilled with the home improvements they made for us. I just want to say, ‘Thank you,’ all day long.”

— Juanisa, Naomi’s mom



Thanks to the CAPP+ repairs in the family’s home, Naomi no longer has a chronic wheeze and cough, and there have been no ER visits or hospitalizations.



# Accessing HEALTHY FOOD

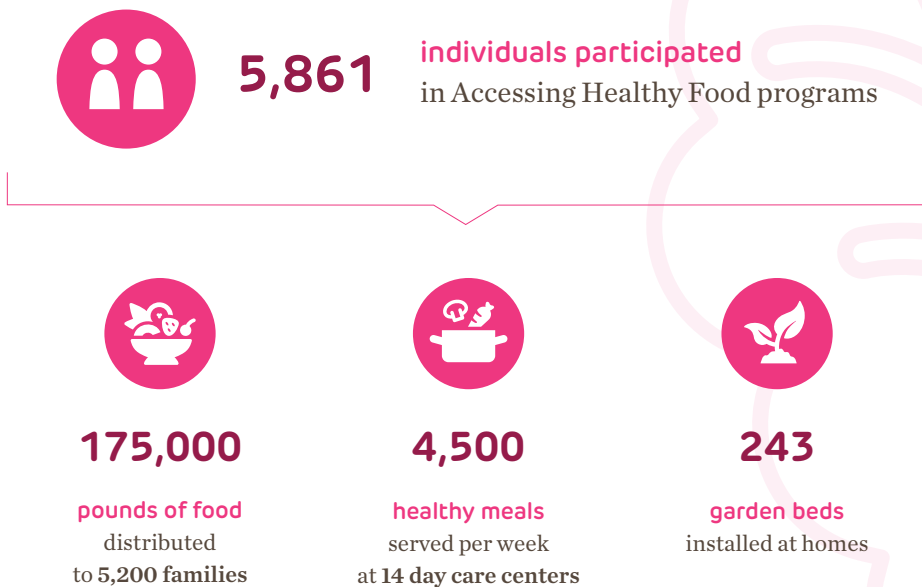




## Approach

Establishing healthy eating habits during childhood may significantly promote overall health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life. However, 30% of children in Philadelphia face food insecurity. To address this issue, Healthier Together employs a comprehensive strategy to promote healthy eating by improving food access, providing nutrition education and supporting local food systems.

## Impact



## Partners

CHOP Food Pharmacy, CHOP Home Plate + Food Bucks Rx, Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia Orchard Project, Neighborhood Land Power Project, Food Connect, Ronald McDonald House, The Food Trust, Reinvestment Fund and several early childhood education centers



*Less than two months after the garden bed was installed on the side of Shelly's row home, it was overflowing with lettuce, chard, kale, cilantro and cabbage.*



## Garden Beds Grow Food, Health & Community

# A NEIGHBOR'S PERSPECTIVE

A collaboration between CHOP Healthier Together and the Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram's Garden promotes healthy eating and improved food access by providing low-cost raised garden beds to residents in Southwest Philadelphia. The goal of the program is to give neighbors the tools and knowledge to grow food on their own turf.

Every year, the team at Sankofa Farms builds and installs wooden garden beds filled with rich soil and starter plants. In partnership with Healthier Together, Sankofa has installed 243 home garden beds. Anyone with outdoor space in Southwest Philadelphia can sign up to receive one. Garden bed participants are encouraged to come to Sankofa Farms for regular workshops to learn more about growing, harvesting and managing their garden beds.

A winter chill was still in the air in March 2024 when the team installed a garden bed in a small, grassy area that gets lots of sun but was largely unused on the side of Shelly's house in Southwest Philly. Less than two months later, the garden was overflowing with lettuce, chard, kale, cilantro and cabbage. Beets and carrots sprouted later, adding a pop of color to the home garden.

At one point in May, there were more fresh greens than Shelly's household could handle, so they harvested eight freezer bags-worth and gave them away to friends. "Throughout the week, my friends sent me photos of their beautiful salads that they were making with the greens that I grew," says Shelly. "It was really nice."



**Step 1:** The team at Sankofa Farms built Shelly's wooden garden bed and filled it with rich soil and starter plants.

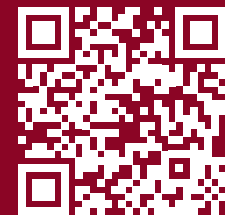
**Step 2:** The garden bed was placed in a small, grassy patch that had been unused beside Shelly's rowhome in Southwest Philly.

**Step 3:** Two months later, the garden flourished with fresh and nutritious vegetables.



“It's a really great way for people in the community to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. There are also benefits beyond having fresh produce on hand. Just on an aesthetic level, I love what it's done for my space. It's been really good for my mental health to have a project that involves doing something every day. It's kind of ritualistic in that way, which I find very soothing.”

— Shelly, participant in the garden bed program



See our video showing Shelly's garden in full bloom!  
[chop.edu/garden-beds](https://chop.edu/garden-beds)



# Overcoming TRAUMA & GROWING RESILIENCE



*“ Families are just so grateful to CHOP for having this program available to them. It’s been an amazing gift to be able to give people the time and space to address moments in their lives that are really significant. ”*

— Dr. Colette Desrochers, Pediatrician at CHOP Primary Care Cobbs Creek

The Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT) program helps providers at two CHOP Primary Care locations — Cobbs Creek and the Karabots Center — proactively screen for trauma during annual checkups, connecting children and their families to the services they need.





## Approach

Unaddressed trauma can have lasting effects on a child's physical and mental health into adulthood. In 2023, nearly 245 individuals died from gun violence in West and Southwest Philadelphia, highlighting the urgent need for intervention. Through internal collaborations and external partnerships, Healthier Together offers services to mitigate the impact of trauma on children's well-being.

## Impact



3,170

individuals participated in Overcoming Trauma and Growing Resilience programs



1,348

people participated in grief services through GRIT



77%

of mental health needs were met for children



9

nonprofits got 20+ hours of training to deliver youth violence prevention services

## Partners

CHOP Center for Violence Prevention, Uplift Center for Grieving Children, University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships, Scattergood Foundation, Urban Affairs Coalition, AFRICOM, Beloved Care Project, Building Healthy Communities within Families, City of Dreams Coalition, EleganceXtreme Inc., Fruits of the Family Table, Ghetto Rising Entertainment, ECO Foundation, Greater Philadelphia YMCA



## Connecting Kids to Services that Build Resilience

# A PEDIATRICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Since early 2021, the Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT) program has helped providers at two CHOP Primary Care locations — Cobbs Creek and the Karabots Center — proactively screen for trauma during annual checkups. Children who experience trauma in the form of gun violence, poverty, racism and violence in school need a wide range of treatment and support services. The program allows providers at these locations to connect children and their families to the services they need.

“Families are just so grateful to CHOP for having this program available to them,” says Dr. Colette Desrochers, a pediatrician at CHOP Primary Care Cobbs Creek. “It’s really powerful.”

“Now, I start my conversation with a child and family by asking if anything unexpected or sad or difficult has happened to them, and when we identify

a need, I can offer tangible support in a way I haven’t been able to before,” says Dr. Desrochers. “It’s been an amazing gift to be able to give people the time and space to address moments in their lives that are really significant. It sets the tone that their emotional health, their family function and their experience as a family unit is important to me, and that mental health is something we are going to be talking about here.”

Dr. Zia Gajary, a pediatrician who practices at Karabots, had always felt helpless when it came to dealing with the trauma-related issues of her patients and their families. Thanks to GRIT, she now feels more empowered. When a patient of hers was a victim of gun violence, the experience traumatized the youth’s family so much they needed to move. Dr. Gajary referred them to GRIT, which helped them connect with both mental health services and relocation assistance.



## Greening a Schoolyard Does Everyone Good

# A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

A collaboration between CHOP Healthier Together and the Trust for Public Land transformed the schoolyards at two Philadelphia elementary schools — Add B. Anderson and Alain Locke — into havens where families can gather, children can play, and neighbors can connect.

Third graders at Add B. Anderson — a school in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood of West Philadelphia — had a seat at the table in the design process to create their new playground. Giving kids the autonomy and voice to identify key elements to incorporate into the space was empowering and life-changing.

Today, the beautiful schoolyard benefits the physical, mental and social well-being of 400 students. The project transformed two acres of broken asphalt into a play space with a running track,

a basketball court, a multi-use field, up-to-date play equipment and picnic tables.

The schoolyard also offers climate benefits. Newly planted trees provide a touch of nature and cooling shade. Rainwater gardens add both beauty and sustainability, helping reduce more than half a million gallons of stormwater runoff from polluting nearby Cobbs Creek and the Schuylkill River every year.

A similar schoolyard transformation took place at Alain Locke, located in West Philadelphia. A total of 265 elementary school students and 7,622 community members now have access to a transformed space to play and learn at the Alain Locke schoolyard in partnership with the Trust for Public Land.



## Approach

Green and public spaces are associated with better mental health outcomes and foster deeper social ties within communities, making them stronger and healthier. Access to quality parks is vital for children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. Healthier Together supports the improvement of public spaces for children to play, families to gather and neighbors to connect.

## Impact



800

vacant lots  
greened through  
a partnership with  
Penn Medicine



700

trees planted  
through a  
partnership  
with Penn Medicine



700

students  
and 17,000 neighbors  
have access to new  
playgrounds

## Partners

Penn Medicine Center for Health Justice, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Trust for Public Land, School District of Philadelphia





The Alain Locke Community Schoolyard was transformed from a barren, cracked asphalt lot into a vibrant community hub with trees, a basketball court, a running track, a turf field and new play equipment.



“The new playground has transformed our school community, giving students a safe, engaging space to explore, play and build friendships. It’s not just a place for fun, but a catalyst for creativity, teamwork and healthy development.”

— Baretta Massey, Principal,  
Alain Locke School



“It was literally just blacktop. It might as well have been a parking lot. We now have a track area where organized activities can be done. Gym classes can now use that to learn how to play games with each other, and kids can climb and swing on actual playground equipment rather than running in circles.”

— Ryan Stevens, Assistant Principal, Add B. Anderson School



# Creating FINANCIAL STABILITY & PROSPERITY



*The moment Conita walked into the Nicholas and Athena Karabots Pediatric Care Center in 2022 to begin serving as a volunteer, she knew she was in the right place. Hanging on the wall in front of her was a self-portrait her daughter had painted more than a decade prior, when she was a student at Philadelphia's High School for Creative and Performing Arts.*

*"I would have no other reason to go to Karabots, and we had no idea that's where that painting was," she says. "I said, 'I'm supposed to be here!'"*



Volunteers are the backbone of the free tax preparation services CHOP's Medical Financial Partnership (MFP) and the Campaign for Working Families (CWF) collaborate to offer every year to families in West Philadelphia. In 2024 alone, more than 330 federal tax returns were filed through the program, with an average refund of \$1,893 per household.





## Approach

Economic inclusion and financial mobility are vital for the prosperity of households and communities. In Philadelphia, nearly 30% of children live below the federal poverty line, which can negatively impact their health. Healthier Together offers access to financial counseling, supports tax preparation and benefits navigation, certifies small businesses, and enhances job training opportunities.

## Impact



4,032

individuals participated  
in Creating Financial Stability  
and Prosperity programs



360

participants  
saw an increase in their  
credit score after free  
financial services



542

people participated  
in workforce  
development  
programs



\$1,500,000

to households  
using tax preparation  
services

## Partners

CHOP Medical Financial Partnership, CHOP-RISES, Clarifi, Campaign for Working Families Inc., Benefits Data Trust, The Enterprise Center, Findhelp.org, PowerCorpsPHL, Philadelphia Department of Public Health



## Free Tax Prep Helps Families Achieve Financial Well-Being

# A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

CHOP's Medical Financial Partnership (MFP) and the Campaign for Working Families (CWF) collaborate every year to offer tax preparation services at no cost to families in West Philadelphia. The goal of the program is to provide high-quality financial services that help families build their wealth, and thereby improve their health. In 2024, more than 330 federal tax returns were filed, with an average refund of \$1,893 per household.

Two years after Conita Pierson retired from a fruitful, 30-year career with the Free Library of Philadelphia, she signed up to volunteer with MFP's tax prep services. She saw it as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of her beloved neighbors.

"I've always been a person who thinks, 'I can help with that,'" says Conita, a lifelong resident of West Philly. "I like helping my people. It's about community."

Volunteers like Conita, who generously contribute their time and skills, are the backbone of the tax prep program. Every Saturday morning from January to April, Conita serves as an intake specialist, greeting people when they come in to get their taxes prepared. One of the most important skills Conita brings to her volunteer work is the ability to help participants feel more comfortable sharing financial matters with strangers.

"I know some people get intimidated interacting with people and talking about their money," she says. "I have a skill and ability to be patient with people and listen. I know I do that very well."

A total of \$1,500,000 has been returned to community members for tax refunds through the Medical Financial Partnership program.





# OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Healthier Together has made great strides toward improving the health and well-being of children, families and communities in West and Southwest Philadelphia. In the last five years, we've pursued evidence-based strategies, expanded our reach, developed trusted partnerships, improved neighborhood conditions and supported the growth of the local economy.

As we reflect on our achievements and the work still ahead, we recognize our journey is far from over. Healthier Together will continue to implement evidence-based strategies to improve social health conditions, but our strategy will evolve to a “place-based” framework that promotes health equity and improves outcomes in the spaces where children LIVE, LEARN, PLAY and HEAL. By collaborating with local stakeholders — including schools, CHOP healthcare providers and community organizations — we are creating a holistic, integrated and child-centered strategy to address the social drivers of health. This strategy not only benefits the health of children and families, but it also strengthens communities, fostering

supportive environments that cultivate healthier and more equitable neighborhoods.

This new framework will emphasize collaboration, innovation and community engagement — connecting with children in their neighborhoods and welcoming community programs to CHOP. The updated strategy of Healthier Together will focus on the following key areas:

**LIVE:** We will promote healthy homes and assist families with stable housing while supporting a nurturing, safe and engaging environment.

**LEARN:** We will support child socio-emotional skill development and create learning environments that are nurturing, inclusive and safe for children.

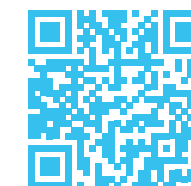
**PLAY:** We will increase access to healthy, safe and engaging green and recreational spaces.

**HEAL:** We will foster partnerships between CHOP and the community to promote trust and holistic healing, including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.



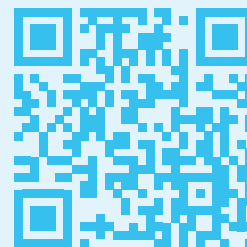
“ Healthier Together is committed to supporting more equitable communities and ensuring every child has a chance at a healthier future. We hope you find inspiration in the positive changes we’re fostering and share our excitement for the future of Healthier Together. ”

— Dr. Vanesa Karamanian,  
Director of Healthier Together,  
Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia



Thank you to our partners, Community Advisory Board (CAB), Oversight Committee, Topic Advisors and stakeholders. Our success wouldn’t be possible without them. To see the full list of organizations and individuals who have generously donated to help fund our work and work alongside us, visit [www.chop.edu/ht-partners](http://www.chop.edu/ht-partners)





## LEARN MORE & GET INVOLVED

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email [HealthierTogether@chop.edu](mailto:HealthierTogether@chop.edu)