

Homewood Children's Village - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Residents Advocate for Neighborhood Improvements

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, Homewood Children's Village (HCV) has been working to advance resident-driven policy implementation and create the foundation for ongoing equitable policy change that supports positive climate, health, and equity outcomes. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3. Learn more about their work on their website [here](#).¹



Mission:

To improve the lives of Homewood's children (Pittsburgh, PA) and simultaneously reweave the fabric of the community in which they live.

HCV serves children, families, and the community through collaboration, engagement, advocacy, research, and programming to break down barriers to economic success. The breadth of HCV's CCHE-funded activities are outlined in a 2022 CCHE theory of change [here](#) ([slide 23](#)) and described in more detail below. Within the CCHE Initiative, HCV and implementation partner Green Building Alliance developed and launched Change Champions, a program within HCV's broader Leadership Institute. The Change Champions curriculum builds residents awareness and skills around environmental health, climate change, and policy advocacy to empower residents to address local challenges impacting their health and wellbeing. Through this program and other CCHE initiative efforts, HCV has seen an increase in the number of engaged residents effectively advocating with local officials for improvements to the built environment and other climate justice issues to improve health and community wellbeing and resilience.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Educated, engaged, and built the leadership, capacity, power, and networks of residents to advance policy change in support of positive climate, health, and equity outcomes via Change Champions training program. The neighborhoods served by HCV have higher prevalence of asthma, among other environmental health issues, compared with other parts of Pittsburgh. These issues impact children and families in a myriad of ways, including lowered school attendance. By building awareness and the skills among residents, they can advocate for changes – for example, to improve air quality to reduce the impacts of asthma. “There are so many challenges for kids beyond just themselves. We need to address those environmental issues [holistically] for them to be able to thrive and succeed.”

Select Resources and Media

- [2021 Beacon Award Announcement](#), Green Building Alliance
- [Reflections on 2020 and Looking Ahead](#), 2021 video featured by the Kresge Foundation

¹ This case story was developed by the Ross Strategic Evaluation Team based on secondary data and key informant interviews.

The Change Champions program engaged residents in a 12-week curriculum and resulted in a ripple effect of resident advocates working at the neighborhood and city scale to improve their communities' environment, health, and resilience. The program grew, beyond the original three neighborhoods, to work with residents and partner organizations from Homewood, Hill, Hazelwood, Beltzhoover, East Hills, and Wilkinsburg. "They're all reaching out to their elected officials [on common issues like neighborhood blight, flooding, failing infrastructure], we know have four in different neighborhoods to advance concerns and/or legislation that means it's that much more likely to be addressed." Participants in each cohort range in age from youth to retirees and this intergenerational aspect added to the value of the program. Graduates are activated for policy change in support of healthy, equitable, resilient neighborhoods and have the knowledge, advocacy skills, and relationships to advocate effectively. They have gone on not only to advocate directly with their representatives, but to also hold leadership positions in the community. Graduates have joined community advisory boards, started work on housing justice with a local non-profit, became bike or stormwater ambassadors with the City, and joined HCV as staff to train other resident advocates.

Leveraged government funding to support local resilience and sustainability plans and the Pittsburgh Comprehensive Plan to prioritize community needs for improved health and resilience. HCV is working with partners from the CCHE initiative to leverage government funding for remediation to ensure it reaches the people impacted by climate change. This includes funding for solar panels, back flow regulators, and weatherization. HCV's partners in the Beltzhoover neighborhood have successfully worked with the City to improve a local park which has become a safe space for the community.

Worked with Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) on strategies for climate, health, and equity policies. RCOs are neighborhood community groups registered with the Department of Planning that play a formal role in neighborhood planning and development projects. "We're seeing a lot more engagement from our cohort residents [at the RCOs]. CCHE Change Champion grads are really engaged." For example, when the Homewood neighborhood RCO hosted a meeting about a new development proposal, residents asked questions about parking and runoff; ultimately, the developer had to rework the parking lot based on the concerns raised by residents. "It makes my heart smile when I hear a resident asking questions about environmental issues at an RCO meeting, it's almost always one of our [graduates]."

Support Change Champions to influence Comprehensive Neighborhood 10-year plans. Each community has a Comprehensive Neighborhood Plan that developers must review when building in a neighborhood and with the RCO. HCV reviewed the previously finalized Homewood Neighborhood Plan and suggested amendments to improve alignment with resident concerns and priorities around climate resilience and environmental health. Hazlewood's plan was under development in parallel to the Change Champion program during the CCHE initiative, such that Change Champions residents helped to inform that plan.

Partnered with grassroots organizations to build strong, impactful collaboration. HCV has grown and deepened partnerships with other organizations and with the City. For example, HCV was able to work together partners within the neighborhoods to leverage the insights and input from residents to apply for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Change Grant. The relationships built through CCHE-related work helped move the opportunity from a potential competition to a strong collaboration among neighborhood organizations. "That's a huge win. Even though we didn't get the funding (yet!), we are proud of what we were able to accomplish in putting together the application as a collaborative group."

Utilized local qualitative and quantitative data sets to engage residents on specific issues in their neighborhood and established further data collection and needs assessment with communities. One example of this work includes HCV's partnership with RAND Corporation to understand the impacts of urban flooding in neighborhoods that HCV serves. Through resident engagement and data collection, HCV and RAND Corporation developed qualitative and quantitative data that bring light to an environmental public health issue that has long been ignored in the city. "There's no water here, but we have some of the worst urban flooding because of poor infrastructure even though it doesn't get any coverage." HCV and RAND Corporation were able to leverage that work to garner EPA funding and take this work even further. They are now working with the University of Pittsburgh to study air pollution and through the HCV's Leadership Institute resident cohort, they are sharing results back with community members.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Black elected officials	Government Partner
Center of Life	Community Partner
City of Pittsburgh	Government Partner
Green Building Alliance	Community Partner
Hill Consensus Group	Community Partner
Primary Health Care Services	Health Partner

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Equity, climate justice, and environmental justice considerations are becoming increasingly common in new development, including healthcare facilities, and remediation.** For example, HCV's local healthcare partner and others developing new facilities in Homewood prioritized sustainable construction methods, environmentally friendly solutions, and protective measures against flooding, etc. HCV noted that this change in the way people think about construction and built environment related to climate, health, and equity cannot be attributed to any one factor or organization but their work, and that of many other organizations have contributed to this shift.
- **Synergistic effect of different funding streams and partnerships can grow and sustain momentum.** HCV found that support from the CCHE initiative helped them leverage funds from other philanthropic entities, and vice versa. Similarly, HCV's partnership with primary care service entities in the CCHE initiative contributed to stage setting for that partner's successful fundraising for a new facility with an emphasis on environmental health issues. "[Through our CCHE-funded work], we've stabilized our work in this area [...], expanded our footprint in the city, [and] deepened partnerships."

Looking Ahead

HCV will continue to build on their strong relationships with partners to further advance policies that address climate, health, and equity issues affecting children and families in Homewood and surrounding neighborhoods, in addition to their ongoing research activities and youth, family, and community programming. HCV also expects to continue their partnership with the local medical system and insurer in which HCV staff connect with patients who have not been in for a check-up recently to support preventative care and community health and wellbeing. HCV is considering innovative approaches for leadership programs within their Leadership Institute, such as integrating components of the Change Champions curriculum or environmental justice aspects into other offerings, and offering shorter, more bite-sized trainings for those who are unable to commit to a 12-week program.