

## **Capture Teams Update**

**To: Vision Together 2025 Board Meeting**  
**From: Quan Britt**  
**Date: January 9, 2024**

### **Bikes and Trails**

Mike Cook and team. Business as usual on the Incline Hillside still building trails and staying active. Just finished with the final new trail and are working their way back through the trail system. Maintaining the existing trail system. Getting everything in order and would like to have things ready by the opening of the incline plane. Plans are to keep moving through and getting as much done as possible through the winter.

### **GREENSPACE- COMMUNITY GARDENS Gary Weible**

With the weather we didn't have any projects for the Greenspace team. People won't have anything for the next few months. We are still meeting and making plans regularly. We met with Ian Imhoff and Jared Campagna over at the city to discuss more potential greenspaces and were waiting for them to get to us on that.

### **UNITED NEIGHBORHOODS**

Greater Johnstown United Neighborhoods Neighborhoods have been holding their monthly meetings regularly. We Had our neighborhood report out on December 14th 2p @ the Holiday Inn. Attendance was a bit low. We will be looking into how we can get more participation from the community to attend our next report out. We have a tentative date for January 31,2024 for the next United Neighborhoods meeting.

## **TREEVITALIZE**

**We met with Brad Clemenson about Tree Grant. We know that Western Conservation will be in charge of that part of the grant. CFA will be doing the marketing and PR. We will be looking to form a taskforce to deliver on taking care of the trees after they are planted. We had our meeting with the western pennsylvania conservation and the USDA to get more info. We are in the process of waiting for our partnership organization to contact us to discuss next steps.**

## **WASH AND TUNE**

**Barb Zablotney**

**We had our first Annual Wash and Tune event on October 27, 2023. This event was for us to get all the wheelchairs throughout the city washed and tuned up. We had volunteers from several organizations to help. We did this with a setting of a community resource day with organizations setting up tables to offer more info and resources to help those in wheelchairs. Plans are to do this 1-2 times per year.**

## Health & Wellness Work Group

January 8, 2024

10:30 a.m. – Conference on the Park, Central Park Complex

### Early Childhood Initiative

#### PROJECT NARRATIVE:

Local organizations including the 1889 Foundation, Center for Population Health, United Way of the Laurel Highlands, Community Foundation of the Alleghenies, and Lee Initiatives, Inc., (Early Childhood Initiative Committee) and Vision Together 2025 are collaborating to develop an *Early Childhood Initiative* (ECI) with a mission of meeting the educational, health, and social needs of our youngest, most vulnerable residents (birth to age 8). The long-term goal would be to sustain this standard permanently as this achievement level is a marker of future academic, health, social and employment success.

Cambria County currently ranks 64<sup>th</sup> out of sixty-seven counties in the Commonwealth of PA for health outcomes and Somerset County currently ranks 39. 19% of both Cambria and Somerset County children are living in poverty, which is higher than the state and national averages.

Utilizing the Five Freedoms for America's Children framework, proposed by U.S. Senator Bob Casey, the Committee seeks to address five profound issues impacting children in our community including:

1. Freedom to be healthy
2. Freedom to be economically secure
3. Freedom to learn

**4. Freedom from hunger**

**5. Freedom from harm**

The ECI Committee proposes a systems-wide coordinated approach, bringing all agencies together to work towards collective strategies and goals to improve the health of our youngest residents. These partners have hired a consultant to convene the community-based early childhood organizations, identify opportunities for improvement, and create an implementation plan for a pilot program.

**MEASUREMENTS:**

- 1. All children in grade three will be at or above the Pennsylvania reading proficiency level (data source?)**
- 2. Improve Children in Poverty rates ([www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org))**
- 3. Increase number of eligible children with access to/enrolled in high quality, publicly funded pre-K**
- 4. Increase high quality providers who are achieving 4 star rankings from Department of Education**
- 5. Increase number of individuals in the early childhood workforce**

## Physical Health Initiative

**Purpose - Improve physical health outcomes in Cambria and Somerset counties**

### **PROJECT NARRATIVE**

**Cambria County currently ranks 64<sup>th</sup> out of sixty-seven counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for health outcomes. The Health and Wellness Committee of Vision Together 2025 has identified several physical health initiatives that could have a significant positive impact on improving these health outcomes.**

### **KEY INITIATIVES**

- **Mobile Health Unit**

**The Richland Family Health Center received funding in the amount of \$250,000 to purchase a mobile health unit to serve the citizens of Cambria and Somerset counties. Isolation from health and human services prevents individuals and families from accessing needed care and community supports. The mobile unit will be used by the Health Center to provide services for at-risk individuals with limited transportation options or those who may be hesitant to seek care. Funding in the amount of \$X a year is needed for staffing and on-going maintenance for the unit. The Health Center would be able to bill for a portion of the clinical services provided, but general education and outreach on additional health topics could be incorporated into the mobile health unit initiative.**

- **Physical Exercise/Youth Initiative**

**The Greater Johnstown YMCA, FWA gym, 1st Summit Arena and Big Dawg Built have launched a health and wellness initiative to provide safe places for at-risk youth. Through this collaboration, they have created a series of overlapping programs for distinct age groups, each weekend, providing positive role models and encouraging strong character development through initiatives including physical activity, substance use and mental health interventions, and quality in-person social interactions. These programs are varied, age appropriate, community centered and coordinated, and supported by a variety of local stakeholders. From out of school tutoring time, to weekend activities and programs, the**

**collaboration provides options and positive opportunities for youth. Funding needed to sustain this initiative is \$245,000 per year.**

- **Health Education strategies**

**Center for Population Health and community partners launched health educational sessions in the Johnstown Housing Authority communities as well as various senior center locations across Cambria County. Every Wednesday from October, 2023 through May, 2024, fifteen different educational topics will be taken directly into the communities. Topics provided by trained professionals will include fall prevention, food education, safety/scams, transportation, substance use disorder, senior resources, employment, tobacco cessation, hypertension and more. Funding in the amount of \$50,000 a year is needed for incentives for program participation in education sessions, giveaways, and for stipends for agencies providing their time and expertise on each topic.**

## Quality Affordable Housing Task Force

<b>PURPOSE</b>	Develop effective approaches to addressing the challenges of affordable housing in the context of persistent and concentrated poverty, blight, public safety, and the need for more market rate and workforce housing for residents in the downtown and key neighborhoods
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### PROJECT FACTORS:

A team of Johnstown leaders and organizations launched a new “Quality Affordable Housing Task Force” to move forward on effective approaches to addressing the challenges of affordable housing in the context of persistent and concentrated poverty, blight, public safety, and the need for more market rate and workforce housing for residents in the downtown and key neighborhoods.

**Why a Task Force is needed:** Johnstown is the poorest city in Pennsylvania, with severe socio-economic challenges including depopulation, blighted structures, struggling schools, and public safety issues. The Johnstown Housing Authority (JHA) manages 1,504 public housing units in 148 buildings, mostly located in the City of Johnstown, as well as 960 HUD Section 8 vouchers. When JHA’s existing public housing units were built between 1943-1976, they were sought after and fully occupied. At that time, the City of Johnstown and Cambria County had a larger population and reliable jobs in the steel mill industry. With the mills closed and a drastically decreased population today, yet the existing public housing units are still fully occupied. Further, the public housing units built for families in the 1940s and 1950s are functionally obsolete. The existing styles of public housing are not attractive to families, concentrate poverty, and yet are still full.

This means that well over 20% of the City’s population lives in low-income housing units based on a 2.2 person/unit average – that’s *10 times the national rate* of 2.1% living in low-income housing. Some of the public housing buildings are functionally obsolete. HUD regulatory requirements may factor in, as residents from other counties and states are moving into

available subsidized housing in Johnstown, some just to obtain a housing choice voucher and use portability procedures to move out of the area later. There is also concern from local schools about frequent student population changes causing serious impacts and disruption.

**Progress Already Underway:** The Task Force is pleased to report that recent steps of progress are already underway:

o **High-Level Federal Attention Secured:** Senior officials at the White House, HUD Headquarters, and the HUD MidAtlantic Regional Administrator have already confirmed that they understand that Johnstown is struggling with these issues, and have committed to focus attention and resources to find effective solutions and steps forward.

o **PA Congressional Delegation in Support:** Congressman John Joyce and his staff, Senator Bob Casey and his staff, and the Office of Senator John Fetterman have conveyed clearly that they recognize these issues, and are committed to supporting effective, practical steps forward.

o **Family-Self Sufficiency Resources Secured:** On January 26, 2023 HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge announced that the Johnstown Housing Authority was selected as an awardee for the competitive “Family Self-Sufficiency Program” (FSS), which provided Johnstown with a “Program Coordinator” to provide support for families in Johnstown’s HUD-assisted housing to boost financial empowerment, reduce or eliminate the need for welfare assistance, and make progress toward economic independence and self-sufficiency. See [www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_23\\_017](http://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_23_017).

o **Johnstown Officials Welcomed HUD Regional Administrator for Community Visit:** The Task Force joined in productive conversations with HUD MidAtlantic Regional Administrator Matthew Heckles in April, 2023 during his visit to Johnstown for a community workshop to discuss effective approaches for moving forward. Appointed by the President, Mr. Heckles has substantial experience in these issues, as the previous Chair of the Wilmington, DE Housing Authority, the Assistant Secretary of Community Development for the State of Maryland, and in roles as the Director of Housing Finance, Director of Policy & Planning, and Legislative & Policy Advisor for the Delaware State Housing Authority.

**Key goals for the Quality Affordable Housing Task Force include:**

1.) **Engage the Johnstown Community on Effective Approaches:** The Johnstown-Cambria community is well aware of the challenges and troubles with the low-income housing situation, but few viable and effective approaches for improvement have been identified. The



**Quality Housing Task Force aims to engage key stakeholders and the public together, with supportive tools and assistance, to find effective pathways for improving this situation for the Johnstown community.**

**2.) Technical Assistance & Strategic Planning: Johnstown had sought technical assistance from expert public housing consultant teams on how to tackle these issues, through the HUD “Community Compass Technical Assistance & Capacity Building Program”, the “Distressed Cities and Persistent Poverty Technical Assistance Program”, and other similar approaches.**

**3.) Neighborhood Transformation Plan: Johnstown applied and unfortunately did not receive a “HUD Choice Neighborhood” planning grant in 2023, which would have provided \$500,000 in planning funds to support evaluation of how to address severely distressed and obsolete public and HUD-supported housing, and to create a “Neighborhood Transformation Plan” for community revitalization. Plans are to re-submit the grant application in the spring of 2024. The planning grant could also set Johnstown up to compete for a HUD Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant of up to \$50 million to implement the transformation plan.**

**4.) Social Services to Address Urgent Needs: Johnstown organizations will continue to provide effective social, human, and public health services to economically distressed and vulnerable populations in Johnstown-Cambria, whether or not they are in public or voucher-supported housing units. Johnstown will collaborate with local, state and federal officials to identify and secure grants and other resources for community health, blight elimination, social services, youth mentoring, and community policing and crime reduction approaches.**

**5.) Elevate Johnstown Housing: The Task Force will continue to support the effort to boost housing rehabilitation, market-rate, workforce, and other quality housing in Johnstown, as envisioned in the “Elevate Johnstown” study released in May 2020, and through emerging plans to transform downtown Johnstown for quality workforce housing. This approach also includes innovative initiatives such as “Project Resurrect Johnstown” led by non-profit Hosanna Industries, backed by the City, the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, and the philanthropic community, to provide free housing repairs to Johnstown homeowners, to help prevent these structures from becoming blighted.**

## **Hope 4 Johnstown**

## **PROJECT FACTORS:**

**Hope 4 Johnstown is a grassroots organization established by members of the community to curb violence in the city, utilizing the Cure Violence Global model. Cure Violence programs work on the premise that violence is contagious and acts like an infectious disease. Once violence erupts, it spreads like an infection among the people it touches.**

**Community members representing law enforcement, city government, community groups, and private citizens within Johnstown began meeting in 2016 with the intention of finding a means to stem violent crime and achieve “Zero Deaths”. This group coalesced into the formal organization Hope 4 Johnstown in February 2018. The group identified a Cure Violence program as the best means to treat violence. H4J, in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and the City of Johnstown, acquired multiple grants to launch its Cure Violence program in 2018 and 2019. The first Three Cure Violence employees were hired in 2019 through a partnership with Penn-Highlands Community College. Hope 4 Johnstown became a registered nonprofit in 2019.**

**There are three critical elements to the program. Highly trained individuals, called Interrupters, who have social credibility, work in the community to detect incidences that can lead to violent outcomes and stop them before the escalate. The Interrupters also help change the attitudes of individuals who engage in violence. Lastly, the group mobilizes the community to spread the word that violence is unacceptable.**

**Funding in the amount of \$X is needed to hire additional interrupters to expand the work in more Johnstown communities. Additional funding in the amount of \$X is needed to expand on community outreach events held each week in the summer.**

## **Mental Health Collaborative**

<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>The primary objective of this initiative is to...</b>
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**PROJECT NARRATIVE:**

**The U.S. behavioral health crisis has affected every corner of the country, but has had a significant impact on rural areas in particular. As the national shortage of behavioral health providers grows, rural communities are finding it more and more difficult to recruit and retain psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals.**

**This holds true for Cambria and Somerset Counties, Pennsylvania, where there is a significant need for psychiatrists, who are able to provide psychological treatment and medication, and other mental health professionals,. There are significant wait times for first time appointments for mental health professionals, up to six months within certain practices. While telehealth expansion during the pandemic has been helpful, there are still major barriers to utilization including reimbursement constraints, lack of broadband access, and utilizing providers based outside of the community who may not be familiar with the challenges individuals in rural communities face.**

**Currently, there are several pending retirements in the Cambria and Somerset psychiatry workforce, which will result in even more delays for appointments. The County Health Rankings data shows that there is 1 mental health professional for every 900 individuals in Somerset County and 1 for every 460 individuals in Cambria County, with the top performing counties in the U.S. having 1 mental health professional for every 350 individuals.**

**In May of 2022, community providers in the region developed a Mental Health Collaborative to discuss challenges to care and develop solutions. Priority areas of focus identified by the Collaborative include:**

- **Challenges regarding significant delays in credentialing and insurance licensing process. Discussion has been held with Pennsylvania Department of Human Services representatives sharing the delays in the iPromise Credentialing System and the need to address this issue at the state level.**
- **Decreased reimbursement from payers.**
- **Need for expanded inpatient services/partial hospitalization services.**
- **Challenges to recruitment of mental health professionals as well as support positions. There has been discussion regarding promoting opportunities for**

**providers under the physician shortage area designation, as well as outreach to medical schools to discuss a potential residency rotation/co-op.**

- **Education needed to enhance the skill set of Primary Care practitioners on best practice treatment/prescribing. A Project Echo series will be launched in early 2024 to bring best practice resources and information to local practitioners.**
- **Youth/School District mental health service needs.**
- **Mental health support for first responders.**
- **Need for expansion of social support programs for individuals with a mental health disorder.**

## **Food Security and Education Initiative**

**PROJECT FACTORS:**

The Greater Johnstown community is working to meet food needs of our residents through coordinated action, new food delivery systems, and new institutional programs. Initial priority initiatives include:

1. Support for the Johnstown-Cambria Local Food Systems Coordinator, who is a cross-system food convener of organizations and projects and who can promote streamlined efficiencies, reduce duplication of efforts, and ensure community food connections to provide greater healthy food access for low-income and vulnerable populations.
2. Expansion of nutrition education through programs like the *Wellness Wednesdays* educational outreach program in at-risk housing communities, after-school programs and through the local library system.
3. Decreasing food insecurity through education on SNAP benefit eligibility, communication on food pantry locations, and promotion of food support programs such as the Backpack Project, Summer Feeding Program and College Pantry Coalition. Conversations are currently underway to also address the needs of communities in Cambria County experiencing a food desert due to a major grocery store closure in downtown Johnstown.
4. Development of programs utilizing food as an economic driver including the launch of the food incubator in downtown Johnstown and potential use of the train station for local food systems promotion.
5. Expansion of community gardens through initiatives like the established Sandysvale Gardens and planned launch of the Nanty-Glo Community Garden.
6. Growth of Farmer's Markets in downtown Johnstown and additional pop-up market locations.
7. Connections to local farmers and community organizations to facilitate more local food distribution

## **SUBSTANCE USE**

### **Case For Support**

## **PROJECT NARRATIVE**

**The Cambria County Drug Coalition (CCDC) is an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization which focuses on all substance use disorder related issues facing Cambria County. The Coalition follows the national Drug-Free Communities Model from the Office of National Drug Control Policy at the White House. Our Mission is to create drug free communities across Cambria County through the reduction of youth substance use, the improvement of systems of care and access to treatment for individuals with living with SUD, and the celebration and belief in the reality of recovery. This work is carried out through the 12 sectors of the Coalition which engages community members as volunteers for specified initiatives led by Coalition staff. These initiatives encompass the continuum of substance use disorder prevention and care:**

### **Youth Prevention – (sectors- Schools, Youth, Parents, Youth Serving Organizations)**

- **Evidence Based Drug Prevention Program – Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) implemented in all Cambria County Middle Schools**
- **Annual healthy alternative youth experience – First Waves Cambria where students learn water conservation, healthy choices, the art of film making, and river surfing.**
- **Teen Advisory Committee – opportunity for teens to create a mental health podcast.**

### **Access to Treatment- (sectors- Police, Government, Healthcare, Drug Treatment and Recovery)**

- **Community Narcan Distribution – reduced overdose death by half from 2022 to 2023**
- **Compassionate Outreach for Recovery – bags of first aid, Narcan, test strips and the phone number for 24/7 access to treatment distributed to individuals in active addiction.**

### **Celebration of Recovery (sectors- Business, Faith Based, Media, Civic and Volunteer Groups)**

- **Substance Use Disorder 101 Training – educates community members on the brain disease of addiction, and reduces the stigma associated with it.**

- **Fair Chance Talent – encourages business to hire individuals in recovery.**
- **Wellness Wednesday and Community Events – targeted resource fairs to at risk populations**

### **KEY FUNDING NEEDS ANNUALLY**

- **Youth Prevention – Botvin LST \$25,000 for program costs and staff, First Waves Cambria \$3,000 for 3-day program and staff, Teen Advisory Committee \$3,000 for podcast supplies**
- **Access to Treatment- Narcan Distribution \$5,000 for staff time and location cost, Compassionate Outreach for Recovery \$12,000 for supplies**
- **Celebration of Recovery – Substance Use Disorder 101 Training \$5,000 for staff time and location cost, Fair Chance Talent \$1,500 for staff time, Wellness Wednesday \$3,000 for community engagement items**