

Helping people lead with their strengths: The new way forward for a healthier neighborhood



Project HOPE is an effort of the Ibero-American Development Corporation. Its target area is an ethnically diverse neighborhood bound by North Clinton Avenue, Avenue A, Upper Falls Boulevard and the Genesee River.

A playground. A community garden. A produce stand. On the corner of Clifford and Conkey avenues in Rochester—a central intersection in a transformed neighborhood—there are hopeful signs of a powerful new initiative whose ultimate goal is to improve the health of the community. Physically. Socially. Economically.

Welcome to Project HOPE—Healthy Outcomes through Participation, Education, and Empowerment. Unlike programs of the past led by outside agencies that drove community improvement efforts from the top down, Project HOPE began with direct involvement from residents. Also different from previous turnaround attempts, this initiative set out to build on existing community assets instead of starting with the challenges people face.

Project HOPE recognizes that deep and genuine change has to come from within the community itself. By simply asking people how they can contribute to these changes with the strengths they already possess, the initiative encourages:

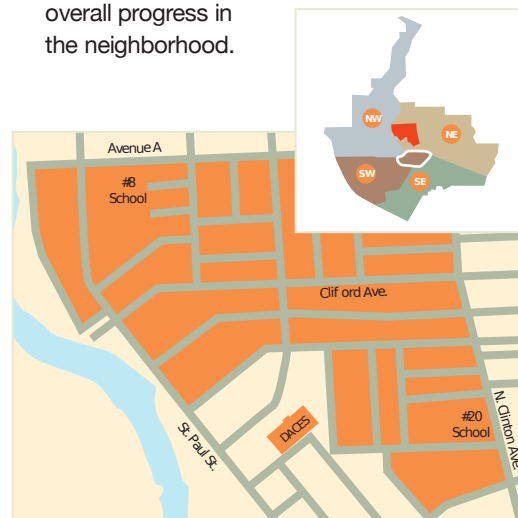
- Participation—residents come together to work on community issues and solve problems together.
- Education—the initiative raises awareness of neighborhood concerns and promotes positive involvement.
- Empowerment—grassroots projects instill a sense of community pride, cohesion, and leadership.

BORN OF INSIGHT, PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Project HOPE began by bringing residents together and thoroughly assessing their vision for the neighborhood. After identifying their strengths and goals, residents came up with four areas to focus on: drugs and alcohol, youth development, public safety, and personal lifestyle changes and healthy opportunities. From the earliest days of planning, neighbors recognized that tackling the local drug issue could impact every area of their community's health.

Next, the project helped people organize and develop a collaborative plan amongst residents, churches, schools, and local government. The initiative encouraged people to put their plans into action on their own—from street cleanups to public art and gardens to playground construction and social events.

Through the initiative, community block clubs have formed, and meet monthly, usually in the home of a resident. Attendees talk about opportunities to improve the neighborhood. Every quarter, block clubs send representatives to a neighborhood council to have a conversation about their overall progress in the neighborhood.



PROJECT HOPE: FAST FACTS

INITIATIVE	Healthy Outcomes through Participation, Education and Empowerment (HOPE)
LOCATION	Northeast side of Rochester, N.Y.
YEAR LAUNCHED	2008
AFFILIATION	IADC (Ibero American Development Corporation)
BLOCK CLUBS FORMED	3
HOUSEHOLDS SERVED	approx. 1,100
UNIQUE PARTICIPANTS	341, as of July 2011
EST. TOTAL ATTENDANCE	981, as of July 2011
ONLINE	www.facebook.com/pages/Project-HOPE/168974756457808

RESIDENT-LED PROGRESS RECLAIMS A NEIGHBORHOOD

One example of how the program is empowering residents is the twice-monthly community walks targeting the drug scene. Residents create posters, go out with 20-30 people from the community, local church parishioners and the Rochester Police Department. Participants stop on corners where there's been drug activity and deliver a positive message through a megaphone: "We're your neighbors, we support you. If you want to change your life, here's an opportunity." The walk gives residents a chance to express their concern and get some exercise. It's also a way to reclaim their public spaces, just like these other signs of progress:

- A community-built playground with support from the Genesee Land Trust, Greater Rochester Health Foundation and the City of Rochester where neighborhood kids can safely play.
- Community gardens tended by residents, where fresh seasonal vegetables ripen just beyond their doors.
- Clean-up days, where neighbors join forces to freshen up the streets.
- Public art projects that display the local creative talents of the community, such as the FUA Krew.



A community-built playground at Clifford and Conkey avenues provides a safer place for kids to gather and be active.

- A Freshwise produce stand on a street corner once considered too dangerous to cross.

To date, roughly 341 unique people have participated in Project HOPE. The initiative tracks involvement down to the individual resident as one measure of success. Plus, door-to-door surveys take a current pulse of the program's impact.

THE MOMENTUM CONTINUES WITH MORE SIGNS OF PROMISE

Project HOPE serves a section of Rochester that has some challenges, but a renewed vitality is taking hold there. Initiatives beyond Project HOPE provide further evidence of a restored sense of community pride, like the El Camino Butterhole - Seneca Park Trail that stretches north to the Seneca Park Zoo and the El Camino Estates housing development.

It took time for the initiative to earn the confidence of the neighbors it serves. HOPE has proven to have traction and endurance in the community. Residents report that they have noticed a drastic improvement. A cohesive community. A sense of hope.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

People's daily lives affect their health in countless ways—from the sense of safety and connection to neighbors, to the availability of healthy food, to access to green space and fresh air. And when neighborhoods are inspired to improve from the inside out by building on their strengths rather than dwelling on needs, they can realize improved physical, social and economic health.

That's the premise of a grant program introduced by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation in 2008 which ultimately funded Project HOPE. The Neighborhood Health Status Improvement initiative supports grassroots efforts to improve the health of people living in neighborhoods challenged by poverty and environmental factors.

Following a year-long assessment of their neighborhood, each grantee brought together residents to implement locally-based plans developed by the neighborhood itself—each one with a vision for a healthier future built on the assets they already have in their community. The Health Foundation initiative was developed with the support of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute at Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy.

Led by the Ibero-American Development Corp., several groups contributed to the development of Project HOPE:

- Clinton Family Health Center
- Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency
- Huntington Park Neighborhood Watch
- Ibero-American Action League
- Los Flamboyanes Tenant Association
- North Clinton Avenue Business Association
- Puerto Rican Youth Development and Resource Center
- Enterprise Community Partners

CONTACT:



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To find out more about the Health Foundation's Neighborhood Health Status Improvement initiative, contact Program Officer Maynor Gonzalez at (585) 258-1703 or mgonzalez@thegrhf.org

