

Transcript: Building Bridges to Advance Equity: A Peer Exchange with HCCC Communities

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Phil Bors:

Hello! I'm Phil Bors, Technical Assistance Director at Healthy Places by Design. Welcome everyone to Building Bridges to Advance Equity: A peer exchange with the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge communities. This is just one part of APHA's national public health week. This session is a collaboration of the Aetna Foundation, APHA, NACo, and Healthy Places by Design. Today's theme is racial equity, and we're excited you can be part of this discussion

We're using Zoom Webinar, for now, so everyone besides the panelists will be muted until later in the session. We welcome your thoughts in the Chat, though. We hope it doesn't happen but if you get disconnected, please log back in.

We have a great two-part session today. For the first portion of our discussion, we will use Zoom Webinar. We're so happy to share a couple brief videos to help us set the stage and introduce the Challenge communities. We'll then get into our panel discussion with five Challenge leaders from communities across the country who will share briefly what they're doing to advance racial equity in their work. Following the panel discussion, we will all transition to Zoom Meeting so we can break into smaller and more interactive discussion groups. We really hope you'll stay with us until 1:30 ET and participate in one of these deeper discussions. This will also be your time to ask Qs, share thoughts and your own equity approaches. In the meantime, make some notes as the panelists speak and you'll get a chance to join a deeper discussion with one of them later, after the panel.

My colleague, Brittany Perrotte from APHA, will now introduce you to the Challenge initiative and get us started. Brittany?

Brittany Perrotte:

My name is Brittany Perrotte and I am the Project Director for the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge at APHA.

On behalf of APHA and the Challenge team, I would like to thank you for joining us in our celebration of National Public Health Week, especially as we focus in on the essential daily theme of Advancing Racial Equity. As many of you know, health equity is a guiding priority of APHA. That's why, since 2016, APHA has collaborated with the Aetna Foundation, in partnership with the National Association of Counties and Healthy Places by Design, to support city- and county-level teams in advancing health equity within their communities through the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge.

The Challenge is an exciting initiative designed to accelerate systems-level approaches to improving community health across 20 communities in California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia. We do this by supporting selected communities to change the way they work together across sectors;

build resident leadership and power; and take collective action. We are so glad that you'll be able to hear from some of these communities today about how they are promoting health equity through improved access to foods that support healthy eating patterns and access to health services.

To get us started, we'd like to share a word from one of our Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge Advisory Council Members, Dr. Aletha Maybank.

Dr. Aletha Maybank:

Racism threatens the health of our nation and has played a significant role in producing and widening health inequities. It's an ongoing public health crisis that needs our attention now. We see racism leading to discrimination, exclusion, it's embedded in our systems, our institutions, policies and practices and its everyday impacts are through various determinants of life like housing and education, the criminal justice system and employment. The structural racism creates a lack of access, opportunity, resources and power. It increases sickness and early death among communities of color which we have seen exacerbated during this time of COVID-19. We must work to dismantle racism and white supremacy and confront the systemic barriers to optimal health. We must apply a racial equity lens to all decisions and re-imagine a future that values all people equally and treats people equitably. Join me in promoting individual and collective actions we can take to advance racial justice to advocate for a healthier nation during National Public Health Week and every day.

Brittany:

The structural racism and need for healing that Dr. Maybank underscored are a central focus of the Challenge. Challenge project teams are building bridges in their communities by engaging resident leaders in advisory boards, food policy council steering committees, community gardens, leadership academies and more.

Now, here is a heartfelt message from our 20 Challenge communities about how this initiative has impacted their work to advance racial equity.

Cambria County team:

I'm Flor from Community Care Hub in Cambria County, Pennsylvania and our six word story in Spanish and English..."Seeds Watered will Flourish Beloved Communities."

Cumberland County team:

Hi my name is Gwendolyn McNeil from the Cumberland County Department of Public Health in North Carolina and our six word story is "Community Involvement within Food Policy Council."

Rochester team:

Hey this is Mike and Levine from Rochester, New York and our six word story is "Rochester Residents Driving the Food Policy Change."

Tompkins County team:

I am Gace Parker Zielinski from the Childhood Nutrition Collaborative in Tompkins County, New York and our six word story is "Empowering Us to Target Root Causes."

Orange County team:

Hi I'm Meg Oaks from Orange County Department of Health in Orange County, New York and our six word story is "Links to Food Programs and Farms."

Forsyth County team:

Hi I'm Saujanya Lakkaraju from Forsyth County, Georgia. Our sixth word story is "Data: Coordinating Services for Vulnerable Populations". Thank you!

Wilkes County team:

Hi I'm Sierra Watson from the Health Foundation out of Wilkes County, North Carolina. Our six word story is "Information Builds Understanding. Understanding Brings Empathy."

Deerfield Beach team:

Hi my name is Michelle McCaw. FLIPANY.org in Deerfield Beach community. Our six word story is "Diverse Community Health Leaders Transferring Power."

Kerrville team:

I'm Reverend Allen Noah from Kerrville, Texas Hope4Health. Our six word story is "Our Community does Better Working Together."

Greenbrier County team:

Hi I'm Sally from Greenbrier County, West Virginia and our six word story is "Grassroots Mini Grants Build Equity in Rural Communities."

New Brunswick team:

Hi I'm Jason from Elijah's Promise in New Brunswick, New Jersey. My six word story is "Everything Can Be Overcome with Time."

Collier County team:

Hi my name is Asmaa Odeh. I am a Food Policy Coordinator from Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council in Collier County, Florida. Our six word story is "Building Local Infrastructure to Improve Food Access."

Perry County team:

Hi my name is Anthony Ritchie with the University of Louisville in the Food and Faith Coalition here in Perry County, Kentucky. We want to create change within communities and bridge the gap to access resources. That's why our six word story is "Building Tools to Fit All Hands."
Thanks!

Cincinnati team:

My name is Michaela Oldfield. I'm Director of the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council and our six word story is "Changing Mental Models Challenging Equity Washing."

Dougherty team:

Hello my name is Fredando Jackson with Flint River Fresh and the Dougherty Fresh Project. Through the Healthiest Cities and Healthiest Counties Challenge, we are advancing racial equity by teaching people how to grow food for themselves in the community where they live.

Pittsburgh team:

"Centering Residents Voices at the Table."

Cleveland team:

Hi. My name is Clara Harb and I am an AmeriCorps member serving as a navigator for the Cleveland Challenge team. Our six word story set against the backdrop of our city: "Briding the gap. Access. Drives. Equity."

Chula Vista team:

We are resident leaders from Chula Vista, California. Our six word story is "Equity in Community, Health for Everyone."

Phil:

Thanks so much, Brittany and Arianne for gathering those videos together. And thank you so much Challenge teams for your inspiring work and those six words snapshots.

We're so lucky to have Heather Murphy with us, who will moderate our panel. Heather is a Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge project lead from Wilkes County, NC and executive director of The Health Foundation, in North Wilkesboro. Thank you so much for being with us today Heather!

Heather Murphy:

I'm so delighted to be here and I want to thank everyone for joining us on this beautiful day. I'd like to begin by introducing our community panel members who are going to be sharing the stage with me today. First off, I'd like to introduce Flor Hernandez. She's a community health worker from the community care hub in Cambria County, Pennsylvania. We also have with us today Fredando or farmer Fredo Jackson, he's the Executive Director of the Flint River fresh in Dougherty County, Georgia.

Also joining us are Margarita Holguin, Director of Partnership Initiatives with We Support U in Chula Vista, California, and the Reverend Allen Noah, a pastor at Barnett Chapel United Methodist Church in Kerrville, Texas.

So I'm from Wilkes County, North Carolina. We're nestled in the idyllic Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, where on a clear day you can see Pilot mountain, which was the inspiration for the fictional town of Andy Griffith Mayberry. It's a beautiful place to raise a child

unless you're unfortunate enough to be one of the one in four children who are food insecure and don't know where their next meal is coming from. The challenge for our rural Appalachian community is to ensure that every child and adult here knows where their next meal is coming from, and that it's healthy.

So, the Health Foundation serves as a backbone entity of this collective impact effort. You cannot achieve equity without including the voices of those who are marginalized by the mindset that only the voices of people with titles and offices and paychecks matter. In truth, the opposite is true. We are all experts in our own experiences. And the expertise of people living at the intersection of poverty, race and place are most needed to be heard, to be heard from and to be learned from. So, we use a framework of Human Centered Design. It's a structured approach to solving for problems that don't have clear answers. It's grounded in empathy research, which allows us to then brainstorm custom designs solutions that lower the costs of risk and the costs of innovation. If you think of an equilateral triangle of people, process and programs, systems change when the relationships between people change. Empathy research is a process that gives us a window into the world of people's experiences, their beliefs, their values, and their behaviors. It helps us uncover insights and uncover our own biases, and keeps us from jumping to programs and solutions before we really know what we're dealing with. It creates trust and buy in where there was none, because we pay people for their time and their expertise as an equity strategy.

Empathy research can be as simple as taking on a beginner's mindset and asking questions. When we listen, listen, listen, without correcting, without feeling we have to agree or disagree, without challenging when we simply listen and practice curiosity. Think of that four year old with the why, why but why why, we can learn a lot. Examples of great curiosity questions include "Tell me more? Why do you feel that way? Can you explain more about that? What makes you say that?" In empathy research, we affirm what we're hearing, even if we disagree, because people are experts in their own experiences. And frankly, we don't all experience the same world in the same way. Multiple teenagers told me, they didn't walk on our Greenway because they didn't feel safe.

That was the day I learned that Wilkes is a great place to be a kid if you wake up white and privileged and can put on a hoodie and take a run without someone suspecting you're a criminal. Another empathy technique is to immerse ourselves in the experiences of others. In Wilkes, the combined costs of housing and transportation is a whopping 72% of income in order to be around 40. If transportation is a barrier to healthy eating, then it must be cost right? But when one of our designers accompanied a mother of three on a trip to the grocery store one mile from her home, we found that mom had no childcare. So, she had to take her kids with her. She got to the bus stop 10 minutes ahead of time, so she wouldn't miss it. It came 10 minutes late, it was cold outside, the route took them through all of our twin towns. It even included a 15 minute smoke break for the driver. All in all, it took 45 minutes to get to the grocery store, one mile from her home. And then the bus had a rule that you could only carry four bags of groceries. So imagine how many times she has to do that in a week.

Another designer made a simple frame. She went into people's homes and said, "Show me what you really don't like about your home. Show me what you really love." And so here's a little guy who's saying, "I can touch my ceiling. With my hand. It's so low. I don't have a window. I don't have a door. I don't have a bed to sleep on."

And then what do you love? "Gosh, I love my mom." Because love prevails. It prevails and Human Centered Design grounds us in that in love and knowledge and wisdom. It allows us to design mobile food markets, so fresh fruits and vegetables can be delivered. And it helps us start programs so that kids have a place to lay their heads at night. Human Centered Design puts people at the center, and it solves for inequities. That frankly exists right before our eyes. If only we had the vision to see them.

So I'm going to start by asking Flor Hernandez floor from Cambria County. Tell us the role you play in the Challenge and tell us what challenges you're using to advance equity in the Challenge initiative.

Flor Hernandez:

Good afternoon. Let me start by thanking you for letting me come to the table. My name is Flora Hernandez and I'm a community health worker with community care hub at Beginnings, Inc. and Cambria and Somerset counties. The Hub is a community based care coordinating network that brings the many resources in our community together to support the most vulnerable population. Local community health workers work closely with families to come connect to social and medical services to remove barriers to health. Now that I got that out the way, we basically, we are meeting our participants where they're at. We are creating inclusion. Basically, we walk with the vibe that all are welcome. No one is turned away. We don't discriminate. We also break down communications and language barriers. And when we say we meet participants where they're at, we're talking about mentally, physically, emotionally, and at times spiritually. So technically, we are meeting people exactly where they're at. If it means filling out a form for them, then so be it. But that's what it is, it is about being that human experience because poverty charges with interest. We think it's something tangible, and at times, it could be something mental. So, that's another way we bridge these barriers is that we promote mental health a lot because we know that is also a big factor when it comes to poverty. And I can keep going if you need me to.

Heather:

That's great. So, Fernando, tell us about your program now.

Fredando Jackson:

And thank you again for this opportunity just to be a part of this discussion related around racial equity. My name is Fredando Jackson. I am the Executive Director for Flint River fresh. We are a nonprofit based out of Albany, Georgia, which is located in the southwestern part of the state of Georgia. Our focus with the Challenge is about increasing access to fresh, affordable food, and our community. And we have multiple strategies that we're implementing to accomplish this goal. But, our real focus is about empowering people to utilize the resources in our community.

Dougherty County has been affected over the past two years, sorry, three years, by multiple natural disasters, risk of tornadoes, hurricanes, and like everyone else in the world, especially the COVID pandemic. At one point in time a year ago, Dougherty County was per capita number four in the world with the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. And so what we've been focusing on with our racial equity and with our projects is how we can bring our communities together, teach them how to grow food for themselves through community gardens, community workshops, and also working with the bread and butter of southwest Georgia, which is our local farming community. Agriculture is the top industry in our state. And so we partner with minority farmers, as well as established farmers to help with teaching people on the ground how to grow seasonal crops on hand. And then as well as working with our local school system to teach the kids directly. We feel that by empowering people and giving them the technical they need, that we will remove the barriers that are through racism, division, to bring people together for a simple gathering of food, because we all have in common in our area, that South Georgia, our culture is centered around food and using that platform to bring folks together. So we look forward to this opportunity to share what we've been doing. And we also look forward to hear from others ways that we can collaborate and do more to make fresh food readily available for those that that need it, to make it readily available for those that want to learn how to do it, to empower themselves to create a sustainable food system that can be passed along from one generation to the next. So I look forward to this conversation. I look forward to learning. And again, thank you again, to the Aetna Foundation, the Challenge and this discussion. We look forward to interacting with everybody through this dialogue. Thank you.

Heather:

Thank you, Fernando. I'm Margarita. Talk to us about the role you play in the challenge and what strategies and approaches are you finding effective to advance racial equity in your community?

Margarita Holguin:

Sure. Well, my name is Margarita Holguin, and I am the Director of Partnership Initiatives at We Support U. My role is to oversee the promotores as our community health workers and community lead leaders in Chula Vista Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge Project, and our project is really looking at improving healthy nutrition and reducing obesity. So, as you can see, the entire project aims at health disparities and is really looking at addressing racial equity. So, an approach that I want to mention is our inclusiveness and how our project is centered on community participation and obviously that is not just having the residents there, but have they be the drivers of this project. From the onset of the project, we have involved key partners who have a stake in our community. They are vested in the project. And they have really been instrumental and reaching the community to recruit the community members that have participated in the stories. So, our approach has been to have our partners be the ones to tell our story to feel that they're part of this project. We have also partnered with the San Diego County Promotores Coalition, which has a countywide network of hundreds of promotores or community health workers. And through this coalition, we were able to reach out to that network and we hired four promotores initially to begin our project. The promotores and our great partners out there have taken the lead on the outreach, and they have successfully helped us

engage community residents that represent the various areas and zip codes of our city. Bandwidth has never been a barrier for us, several of our promotores and residents are monolingual Spanish speakers. We have been able to leverage our partnerships and secure funding for translation. So today, all of our meetings and training have all had simultaneous interpretation. We have a team of nine community leaders and four promotores who are involved in this project and have been involved in all aspects of designing this work. We're not getting the group of people and saying here's a project go do it. Our approach is to provide them with facet building and the skills and the tools that they need to come up with a project that they feel will address the needs and that they have ownership. They're involved from first identifying the issues, from getting all these presentations to know what's going on, gathering data about the community, being part of developing all the steps right now. They're developing interview questions for stakeholders, interviews and assessments. So, they have all this data in the information that they've gathered and they will then move on to coming up with projects that help us address what we want to do. Our project has successfully engaged key stakeholders in our region demonstrating our inclusiveness, city leaders, county leaders, the school districts, superintendents, health and human services in various community partners. So, our project here in Chula Vista is addressing the needs of our community by engaging our members of the community, either stakeholders or residents as true owners. Thank you and I look forward to sharing more.

Heather:

Thank you Margarita. I'm Reverend Noah. Last but not least, talk to us about the role you are playing and also how you are helping advance racial equity in your challenge initiative.

Allen Noah:

Good morning. Thank you for having me. It's exciting to be a part of this conversation. We began our journey in 2013. We cast a vision for Glory community garden in the Doyle community here in Kerrville, Texas. Glory community garden was located in a community that has been marginalized for some 103 years. We wanted to create a space where people can come and have a conversation about life and health and commonalities. We wanted to create a collaborative among city officials and invite others from the community to come and be a part of the conversation to highlight the disparities between our neighborhood and the broader community. What we did in that piece, we cast a vision, improving health, fostering community collaboration, and sharing the love of God. Our first, community partner was the City of Kerrville. In order to have a community garden, you need water. So the city provided water for us. Since that time, we've had 62 additional community partners that have been involved in this project. We shed light on food inequities, lack of transportation and health inequities within this community. Today, part of what we've done with the Challenge are the entities from across the community came together. We formed a collaboration. The grants that came into the community as of today, probably in excess of \$7 million. The Community Center is being renovated. The Food Pantry is up and running. We have health programs next door. And we also have a dental program that's being funded by the Challenge. So, what we've done is that we created a space to have the conversation. Then, people from the community met with the city leaders and met with other community partners. And the dialogue helped shape where we are today. So, we're in

a good place, we're growing, we're excited to be a part of that. We have people at the table who are volunteering, who some five years ago, wouldn't even open a conversation with the city leaders. But now they've taken ownership. They've taken pride in their community. And hope has been reestablished in our midst. So we're happy about that. We want to learn from my colleagues, as we continue on this trajectory. And hopefully, we'll be able to inspire others. You know, the takeout place once we transition out, you know, and keep this momentum going. So, thank you for allowing me to be a part of this.

Heather:

Thank you. So Flor, I'd like to ask you a follow up question. You mentioned that people in your community, as you meet them where they are, have tangible challenges, but they also have mental challenges. And one of the things I've learned in talking with people in my community is that there is a chronic toxic stress associated with racism and marginalization. Could you talk a minute about that in your community?

Flor:

Yes, thank you for that question. In our community, what we're doing is we basically have our little brainstorm, break breakout sessions, also within our CHWs. And that's one of the concerns that does come up to our table. And great examples would be, we are a population that is predominantly white, but we also have African American and Latino community members, but there's lack of access to Latino counselors, Latino doctors, just like African American doctors. So, we try to engage the community by making these issues come to light. We know this issue is here, so how can we come together as optimism engineers, is what I like to call them, and create and cultivate. You know, those seeds are coming in, let's water them. If something needs to be weeded out to let something a new program grow, so be it. But the thing is, how we meet people where they're at is by literally witnessing, walking with them their struggle, their journey. And I love how our CHWS talk about "I am because we are." And the reason is because we have experienced it, we know those hurdles. So we want to be there to say, "Hey, there's a hurdle coming. Let me help you go around it or let me get you a ladder, so you can climb over it." So yeah, we try to bring these issues to the table and shine light on them.

Heather:

Thank you floor. Fernando, you talked a lot about helping empower people in your community. Can you tell us a little more about how you've managed to overcome that feeling of powerlessness that can come from being marginalized?

Fred:

And so again, thank you. So part of what I didn't mention in the intro is that we are part of a collaboration by local government, our school system, our cooperative extension agencies, our city planning, as well. And so one thing that we found as a barrier is always finances is. "I don't necessarily have the money to buy seeds, or I don't have the money to purchase compost, or I don't have the money to to build a garden box." And so what we offer to our program is that if you if you have the interest, and you attend community based workshops, and you have a pool of volunteers, whether they're a church group or a local community group, and the only barrier

that you have is the finances to purchase the items to grow, or you don't have the expertise. So, we stepped in to cover costs. We step in to offer hands on hand to hand workshops, where we walk with you, to show you what to plant, when to plant it, how to take care of it, how to control the pests that you might be dealing with, and then also how to harvest and create a healthy meal. So, we believe like you said earlier how there and in humanity, and us getting together and sharing our collective experiences. So, what we like to do is organize what we call community planting days where we invite the entire neighborhood out for a community garden bill. We just don't do a lot of sweat equity. You know, we have fun. So we have natural, what we call dance breaks where we might do Zumba or we might do the Electric Slide, or we might play some James Brown and get funky with it. And so that's part of our engagement. And then as we're working in other communities, we try to work with them. And so we often times do a quarterly or seasonal sort of community celebration, where people register, again to remove the barrel financially to pick up plants, to pick up seeds. They pick up a grow guide and then we also offer through technology a place where people can have zoom meetings like this and we learn questions that are burning, that they don't feel comfortable asking or making available. And then what we also do is try to find those community champions that pick up the mantle and take on the responsibilities of planning that garden. And then we also know that there are individuals that can't come out to our garden spaces and so we provide a program where they can purchase garden kits from us, and we install them in the community, and we work with young kids. So, these are our high school aged students, that are the ones installing these garden spaces. They're the ones that are leading people on how to plant things in community. And then also we have no respecter of person, or background or ability. So we're working also with individuals that are disabled, and things like that as well, to show that we're all inclusive, to food access, it's all inclusive to everybody being welcomed into the space. And so like I tell everybody, we all have to get our hands dirty, and we all are going to walk away with some dirty knee pads at the end of the day. But like we say, I grow, you grow, and we grow and collectively our community will be well fed, and things like that. We look at finances, and we remove the barriers related to education, and create a plan. And then also we bring in our area farmers who can also provide that hand to show them that they can also grow an abundance that can feed their neighborhood. And the extra abundance can also be utilized to feed on someone that isn't able to get out. And then collectively, we can all make sure that every week, there's a healthy dish on the table, that we all had our hands in growing. So thank you.

Heather:

That was so cool. I always say that Wilkes County is the coolest place no one's ever heard of, but I think Dougherty County, you know, we might have a competition.

Fred:

No, I think it's a mother of great individuals on this call who do phenomenal work based on our peer learning sessions that we've had. So, I can't wait for everybody to hear the work of The Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge. I learned something every peer learning session and I'm humbled by that.

Heather:

So Margarita, I'm hearing a theme here about how people are walking alongside one another. And certainly that is a part of your work. Talk to me about the scaffold of trust or any kind of trust deficit that you might have to overcome before your team can be successful in its work.

Margarita:

Certainly, thank you. Well, we know that community health workers or promotores are a bridge between communities and organizations and projects. So, I think the fact that we've hired these four wonderful promoters who are from the community are people, who are already vested and see the same challenges that are in our community. They are bridging or breaking that gap between the residents and not understanding what's going on and really bridging that. We're also bringing in the city, for example. We're bringing in the county, we're bringing in food systems around CalFresh or other programs and bringing those presentations to the residents so that they can ask the questions. We're opening the door for them to say "D you want to know about this program or do you need to know about what's going on in your community. Then, ask!" Ask the questions. So, we're trying to give them an hour and that recognition that they're the ones that are driving this project. We will ask them questions. We will say "We need to come up with a question. What would you guys like to ask?" And so, giving them that power has given them that trust in the work that we're doing as residents.

Heather:

Thank you Margarita. Reverend Noah. You mentioned this history of marginalization that goes back hundreds of yours. And yet you've been successful in bringing people to the table. How do you get them to hear your truth without feeling shamed and blamed and and how do you bring people to that place where they're willing to move forward? And how important is it that we also look back?

Allen:

I think, in our case, you have the courage to name the problem. And once you acknowledge that the problem exists, then it eases the burden and tears down the barriers of guilt and shame and blame. In 1912, we had a thriving African American Community in this section of Kerrville. Here we are 103 years later: a marginalized community, no public safety, one part that is torn down. The Community had a swimming pool that got field in to make a city gravel pit. It was right across the street in front of the Church. So, you have to raise the question "Would you have that in front of your church in another part of the city?" Well, of course, not. So, you name the reality. Okay, and you acknowledge that this is where we are. So, the question then becomes, how can we collectively as residents and citizens as taxpayers change this situation. So, you open a conversation. And the conversation from the dominant culture is always, what do you want. The answer is simple. Safe streets. a job that would pay me a decent wage where I can pay my mortgage for my children to have an education and a future with hope. So, once we acknowledge all that kind of stuff exists and it gets beyond that, then let's talk about how we can collectively change the trajectory. So, that was kind of the stage that Glory community garden set and created a space to have that conversation. We had seven annual events at the garden. We invited the police department, fire department, the mayor, the City Council and we invited the school systems, Light on the Hill ministries that signed up children for backpacks. We

partnered with other churches to have vacation Bible school, so we brought people together and people began to talk and have a conversation and talk about how we can address this. We engaged the city and the city that ordinance change to allow us to put up a garden center on this open space that was not residential property. So, things like that kind of opened the opportunity and created space for the conversation. And then others in the Community became aware of this neighborhood and the challenges that the neighborhood faced and they came to the table. So that's kind of what brought us to the bill grant, that has brought us to the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge that engages the hospital district, our local university, and brought us to this place where we can address these issues on a human level. It could abate a lot of the hurt and pain and anger that was ingrained in the community and overcame that kind of negativity. It healed wounds and opened conversations.

Heather:

And we do have wounds to heal and I think that what I'm really hearing each of us say and I think it's a really powerful testament to the hard work of collaboration. But, we all have to lean into the discomfort of having difficult conversations, we have to lean into the unknown to learn more and to meet people where they are and I guess the other thing that I'm really hearing from this group is that every community, no matter how difficult the barriers are, there are also strengths to those communities that we are all leaning into and leaning on to create a better community. We are all grateful to the Aetna Foundation for allowing us this opportunity. And I want to thank each of you for sharing your stories. I'm going to turn it back over to Phil and then I think we're going to move along.

Phil:

Thank you so much panel, that was a very powerful discussion.