



Leonard Parker Pool  
INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH

# Annual Report

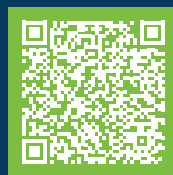
FISCAL YEAR 2025





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*Honoring the Pool legacy...  
and striving toward a  
**healthier future.***



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2021-Present

# Letter From the Executive Director

What an incredible year it has been at the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health! In my first full year as the Executive Director, I am pleased to present our Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report.

While we are all navigating change – at the national, state and local levels – we also recognize that these times call for innovation and the exploration of new opportunities.

This report describes how we have sharpened our commitment to the local context. A few years ago, LPPIH started down the path of focusing on neighborhoods as our unit of change, based on best-practices and watching groups we admire and respect pave the road ahead of us. That approach continues to be validated and affirmed as our collaborative work deepens, with an eye toward health improvement.

This year, LPPIH articulated the following core values that we use to guide this work:

- **Building trusted relationships** – We invest in people and trusted relationships to fuel transformational change.
- **Fostering community** – We operate at the community level, bringing individuals, groups and cross-sector stakeholders together to improve health and well-being.
- **Recognizing interdependence** – We recognize that all elements of a community are part of a larger ecosystem and each holds a part of the solution that enables health.
- **Embracing learning and curiosity** – We are a learning organization and challenge ourselves to continually evaluate and refine our lines of inquiry and action.
- **Acting in stewardship** – We are thoughtful stewards of resources.

We are finding that relationships are the throughline bringing these values to life and enable us to shift from transactional approaches to transformational partnerships that foster change. And in the end, these relationships are what will differentiate our work.

I am constantly amazed by the creativity, innovation and commitment I see among our partners in the work in Franklin Park, first and foremost, in Allentown and across the Lehigh Valley. A few highlights this year include completing a year-long, deep survey of residents through the Flourishing Neighborhood Index, expanding our cohort of trainees in a model called ICT that is bringing healing and hope to our community, and the growing presence of Kellyn's Eat Real Food Mobile Market in Franklin Park, which you will read more about in the next few pages. Other highlights from this year include completing another successful year of the Pool Fellowship for Health, exploring civic leadership models like School Board School, releasing LVHN's 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment, and seeing neighborhood engagement grow through efforts like Uplift, Love Your Block and weekly summer events in the park.

There is no silver bullet that will improve the social and health issues that deeply impact our society. Our investments and work today are focused on a tomorrow where all people have access to the resources they need to thrive.

In this year's Annual Report, you will see a few deeper stories about our work that highlight the partners, the learnings and the momentum we are seeing as we shift the trajectory of health from one of avoiding illness to one of thriving. I am honored to lead this organization and hope that you will continue to join us on this journey.

*Best regards,*

**Samantha Shaak, PhD**

**Executive Director, Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health**



# From Residents to Neighbors

A conversation with Darian and Yolanda Colbert of Cohesion Network



**F**or more than three years, Cohesion Network has been a trusted presence in the Franklin Park neighborhood, creating consistent welcoming spaces where residents gather, share, and shape the future of their community. What began as monthly neighborhood meetings has grown into a powerful movement of relationship-building and resident-led visioning.

At the heart of this work are Darian and Yolanda Colbert. In this conversation, they reflect on their journey, what it takes to build trust from the ground up, and how partners like LPPIH can support meaningful community transformation.

**Q** You often talk about the importance of transforming “residents” into “neighbors.” How have monthly community meetings contributed to that transformation, and what have you learned about building trust and connection over time?

**DARIAN:** Moving from being a resident to being a neighbor really comes down to consistency. We’re not just showing up for our own events – we’re present across the community, and that builds trust over time. This work moves in inches, not miles. Friendships don’t happen overnight; they happen when people connect again and again. When we started the monthly meetings, people were cautious. Over time, through consistency and follow-through, we earned their trust. We were colleagues at first, now we’re friends. We share meals. We check in on each other. That kind of relationship-building is what brings people back.

**YOLANDA:** Being a neighbor doesn’t necessarily mean attending every meeting. It means caring about the people around you and being aware that you live in a shared space. Resident ambassador roles are important – to support people who may not have time to attend every event but still want to

look out for their neighbors. Even small gestures – like a porch party or checking in – can build deep connections. That’s what it means to truly belong. At the beginning, we spent time really listening – learning the history, understanding the dynamics and asking the right questions. That intentionality created a ripple effect. Some people attend every meeting, others prefer to stay in the loop through email, but everyone has a way to stay connected.

**Q** *What are some moments or stories from those meetings that have stuck with you or captured the power of what’s happening in the neighborhood?*

**DARIAN:** One moment that always sticks with me is when Carol Gonzalez, may she rest in peace, saw a neighbor sweeping the block every day. They didn’t speak the same language, but she found a way to connect and later nominated him for an award. Love is a universal language. That’s the essence of what we’re doing – building bridges through simple, powerful acts of kindness.

**YOLANDA:** It’s those moments when the meeting ends but no one wants to leave. People stay talking, laughing and connecting. When conversations spill into the parking lot, it tells us the space we’ve created is working – it’s become a trusted home for connection.

**Q** *How would you describe the role of Cohesion in the Franklin Park community – and how does that role complement the work of partners like LPPIH?*

**DARIAN:** We’re conveners and space-holders. We create a container where trust can form. What makes this special is the support of partners like LPPIH. Also the friendship with Shawn Duncan and David Park from South Atlanta. From day one, they really got it. They became mentors, encouragers and connectors. They’ve helped us access resources and amplified our impact without ever taking over the work.

**YOLANDA:** They called us a unicorn – and honestly, they’re right. It’s rare to see this kind of deep, authentic, collaborative work. LPPIH doesn’t just partner; they believe in the process. They affirm that this slow, steady work is the right work.

**Q** *Community engagement often requires patience and deep listening. What have you learned about building trust, and what shifts have you seen in the neighborhood as a result?*

**DARIAN:** Don’t take things personally. If someone isn’t ready to engage, that’s OK. Keep showing

up. Be consistent. Trust is built over time, and it’s earned through presence, not performance. One of the most powerful shifts was during our meeting on the Recompete Grant. We all read the full proposal together. Residents came prepared and asked thoughtful, informed questions. That level of engagement was amazing – and completely driven by the community.

**YOLANDA:** Listening – really listening – is key. Not to respond or fix, but to understand. When people feel heard, they feel valued. And that lays the foundation for everything else. People are starting to see each other not just as neighbors, but as allies. There’s more collaboration, more curiosity, and more celebration of each other’s wins.

**Q** *Looking ahead, what is your vision for the next phase of work in Franklin Park? What’s next for Cohesion and its role in this neighborhood?*

**YOLANDA:** We want to deepen the roots. The seeds have been planted – now it’s about helping them grow. We’re focused on sustainability, leadership development, and continued collaboration with trusted partners.

**DARIAN:** Our vision is that this model – this movement – can be a blueprint for other neighborhoods too. But right now, our heart is here. We’ll keep showing up, building and walking with this community as it flourishes.

**Q** *What advice would you give to other organizations that want to do deeper, more authentic place-based work in their own communities?*

**DARIAN:** Go slow. Build relationships. Learn the community before you try to serve it. The outcomes will follow the relationships, not the other way around.

**YOLANDA:** Honor the voices of the people who live there. Let them lead. If you do that, you’ll build something that lasts.

The story of Franklin Park is a testament to the power of consistent, relationship-centered engagement. Through the work of Cohesion Network and the leadership of Darian and Yolanda Colbert, residents have become neighbors – connected not just by geography, but by shared purpose and mutual care. This is the heart of LPPIH’s neighborhood development model: creating spaces where trust can grow, voices are honored and community-led change becomes possible.



# Bringing Healing Conversations to the Community

## Integrative Community Therapy in the Lehigh Valley

**L**ike many communities across the nation, the city of Allentown faces a rising demand for mental health support amid a shortage of clinicians. This presents significant opportunity to support the mental health system by investing in preventative efforts, such as improving people's sense of connection, coping skills and resilience.

In response to this growing need, in 2024, Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) and the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health (LPPIH) joined with the Visible Hands Collaborative. This national organization uses guided conversation among members of a community to create a safe space for each participant to become their own therapist by listening to the life stories that are shared. Together, we have introduced Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) to the Lehigh Valley.

### What is ICT?

ICT is a dialogic, therapeutic group methodology created by Brazilian social psychiatrist Adalberto Barreto, MD, PhD, as an accessible, low-cost approach to community mental health. Today, it is practiced in 42 countries around the world. LPPIH and its partners aim to achieve the following by implementing ICT locally:

- Strengthen community development through peer support.
- Promote healthy coping strategies.
- Build capacity among frontline workers and organizations that serve Allentown's most vulnerable residents.

Following the success of our first cohort of 30 participants in FY24, LPPIH launched a second cohort of ICT training in FY25. More than 25 individuals from 12 organizations – including LVHN, the Allentown School District, Lehigh County and several local nonprofits – participated in an

intensive, multi-part training that combined in-person events with eight weeks of virtual instruction and 12 weeks of guided practice rounds.

Participants shared overwhelmingly positive feedback:

“This training has helped me develop my knowledge and see the opportunity to become closer with the people I love and the people I work with.”

“What a great way to unite the community and tap into their strengths, knowledge and power. Thank you to the presenters and the creators of such a dynamic approach to empowerment.”

As we trained this new group of facilitators, we also supported the first cohort in launching ICT rounds across the community. By the end of FY25, ICT was active in at least 10 different organizations, including a university, a transitional living center, outpatient health settings and the county jail.

### Implementation at Lehigh County Jail

“We started ICT in the jail in August 2024. Over time, [people] became more willing to open up and be vulnerable,” says Richard Orlemann, Deputy Mental Health Administrator at Lehigh County. “They shared struggles with mental health, substance use and being separated from family. As trust grew, connections formed – not just in the sessions, but throughout the pods where they live. ICT helped them realize they weren’t alone, and that support was available among their peers.”

Early survey results show promising outcomes: 93 percent of participants reported feeling a greater sense of belonging and connection, while 90 percent said they learned new coping skills.

To better understand the impact and inform future efforts, LPPIH and partners conducted seven focus groups in spring 2025 with ICT participants, facilitators and their supervisors. Key insights that emerged include:

- Participants described the sessions as inclusive and judgment-free spaces where they felt safe sharing deeply personal experiences. Many shared that ICT helped reduce feelings of isolation, encouraged emotional awareness and even inspired them to seek further mental health support.
- People said that they felt less alone. They noted that, even though depression can “make you stick to yourself, when you come here, you realize you’re not the only [person] dealing with this.”
- Facilitators highlighted the personal and professional growth they experienced. ICT helped them build empathy, deepen relationships with community members and improve their skills in leading supportive, healing conversations.
- One manager said ICT brought changes they didn’t expect. It changed their thinking from “manager and clients” to seeing people as human beings.
- Supervisors observed noticeable shifts in staff behavior and communication styles. Facilitators became more present, more active listeners and more attuned to client needs.
- ICT training is helping people learn how to facilitate and not just lead. There’s a difference.

As a result of our continued investment in ICT implementation this year, the region now has a growing network of trained facilitators who are co-facilitating sessions and supporting one another in their continued practice. LPPIH remains committed to providing ongoing technical assistance and peer support to help embed ICT as a sustainable model for mental and emotional well-being in the Lehigh Valley.

Looking ahead, the next step in evaluating this movement is to deepen our understanding of how ICT contributes to long-term health outcomes. By connecting these healing conversations to measurable improvements in well-being, we can further demonstrate the value of community-rooted mental health strategies – and continue to grow a model that supports both individual and collective resilience.



# Who We Are and What We Do

*In FY25, LPPIH's work was featured across national platforms, local media and professional conferences – amplifying our commitment to community-rooted health.*

## POOL SPEAKER SERIES

- The State of Well-Being in Allentown with Jan Emmanuel de Neve (Sept. 25, 2024)
- LVHN 3rd Annual Community Health Symposium – Hazleton (Nov. 20, 2024)
- Preventing Mass Attacks in Schools: Lessons Learned from a Risk Assessment that Failed with Peter Langman, PhD (April 8, 2025)
- Soul Shop for Communities (May 16, 2025)



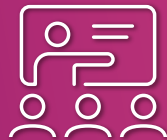
## LEADERSHIP CHANGE

- Samantha Shaak named Executive Director



## TRAININGS OFFERED

- Pool Fellowship for Health | Cohort 10 (Sept. 2024-April 2025)
- Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) | Cohort 2 (Oct. 2024-Jan. 2025)
- Results-Based Facilitation (RBF) Training (May 2025-June 2025)



## CONFERENCES AND CONVENINGS

- American Evaluation Association (AEA) (Oct. 21-24, 2024)
- School Board School and StriveTogether Visit (March 31-April 2, 2025)
- BUILD Health Challenge National Convening (May 12-15, 2025)
- American Public Health Association (APHA) Policy Action Institute (June 16-17, 2025)



## AMPLIFYING OUR WORK

### Media Features & Publications

1. LPPIH's efforts in ICT featured in *Shared Vulnerability and Collaborative Learning Communities* (Nov. 13, 2024)
2. *The Well-Being Report* debuts on WDIY (Jan. 2025)
3. LPPIH featured on Rippel.org
4. Samantha Shaak featured in *Women Leading Systems Change* (Jan. 23, 2025)
5. LPPIH.org redesign (Jan. 2025)
6. *Together for Good: Fellowship* airs on WFMZ-TV (Nov. 9, 2024)

### Presentations & Events

1. Presentation on Pool Fellowship for Health – AEA (Oct. 21–24, 2024)
2. ICT presented at APA Conference (May 17–21, 2025)

# Advancing Humane Housing in Franklin Park

## Investing in stability, dignity and health through neighborhood-based housing work

**A**t the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health (LPPIH), we recognize that the environment in which people live deeply impacts their health and well-being over time. One of the most foundational of these vital conditions is humane housing – housing that is safe, stable and connected to opportunity.

This past fiscal year, LPPIH deepened its understanding of the local housing landscape through neighborhood-based collaboration in Franklin Park, regional planning conversations and the amplification of community voices through platforms like The Well-Being Report on the local public radio station WDIY. These efforts have helped highlight that humane housing is not only a structural need, but a matter of public health.

### Improving the housing landscape

LPPIH has convened the Franklin Park Housing Group (FPHG) since 2022, a place-based collaborative composed of non-profits, legal advocates, city officials and national partners. Together, the group works to improve housing outcomes in Franklin Park by focusing on neighborhood-level change that enhances housing stability, affordability and quality. The group's work is grounded in the belief that housing is a foundation for community health and self-determination.

FPHG has benefited from ongoing partnership with Enterprise Community Partners, a national nonprofit that helps make homes possible for millions of families without one. This group has provided technical assistance in identifying priority areas for intervention and developing a plan to address those areas. We developed a plan that focuses on eviction prevention and resident stability as well as housing quality and availability. Strategies within those two areas include mediation and access to counsel, education for landlords and tenants, and pathways to homeownership and identification of properties and spaces that could benefit from repairs or could be turned into additional housing units.

In early 2025, the Allentown leaders released its Housing Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan, Welcome Home, which revealed that rents in the city have increased by 45 percent and home prices by 64 percent over the past five years. Franklin Park has been hit hard by affordability gaps and displacement risks. The FPHG reviewed the citywide findings to ensure its hyperlocal strategies align with and leverage broader municipal goals.

This work is based on the realities on the ground: over 75 percent of households in Franklin Park are rentals, and more than 40 percent of the people living there are severely cost-burdened, spending over half their income on housing. The neighborhood also has some of the city's oldest housing, much of it in need of repair. Many properties contain lead paint or have been illegally subdivided, presenting health and safety risks for residents.

The work of FPHG is informed by data, which includes national, state, city and local data sources. It also incorporates relationship-building: working with residents, housing stakeholders and community-based organizations to understand the need and the potential. In addition, tools like the Flourishing Neighborhood Index help ensure that our collective plans and vision align with what residents would like to see in their neighborhood.





*Humane housing is more than a physical structure: “It’s housing that is safe, stable, healthy, accessible and appropriate for the family it holds.”*

– Sherri Binder, PhD

## More than structures

In a June 2025 episode of The Well-Being Report co-hosted by LPPIH Executive Director Samantha Shaak, PhD, and WDIY’s Margaret McConnell, guests Sherri Binder, PhD, with Ripple Community Inc., and Vicky Kistler, with the City of Allentown, discussed humane housing and the intersection of neighborhood-level and citywide efforts.

Binder described humane housing as more than a physical structure. “It’s housing that is safe, stable, healthy, accessible and appropriate for the family it holds,” she says. “But it also places housing in the context of community – how it connects to schools, green space, transportation, services and the social fabric of a neighborhood.”

Kistler agreed, noting that the city’s recent Community Health Needs Assessment highlighted social isolation as a major risk factor for poor health outcomes. “We must look beyond the bricks and mortar,” she says. “We need to understand how people fit into the world around them.”

Binder emphasized that addressing housing issues should begin with a commitment to people, not just buildings. “It can be easy to lose the plot when so much of the conversation is about

financing and development,” she says. “But ultimately, the work is about ensuring our neighbors have a good, safe place to call home.”

These insights reinforce the approach of the Franklin Park Housing Group: combining data, lived experience and cross-sector partnerships to advance meaningful, lasting improvements in the neighborhood housing landscape.

As LPPIH continues its work in Franklin Park and across Allentown, the goal remains clear: advance place-based, person-centered strategies that strengthen community conditions and promote health outcomes. Humane housing, as both a health and social imperative, will remain central to these efforts. We believe that to address the drivers of health, people must be able to stay rooted in their communities, raise families and live with dignity.

Housing is a complex challenge that requires coordination among residents, nonprofits, developers, landlords, investors, legal systems and government at every level. Through convening and collaboration, LPPIH aims to help paint a vision in which every stakeholder sees themselves as part of the solution.

# Flourishing Neighborhood Index: A Journey in Trust

Turning surveys into stories – and stories into strategy



**T**he Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health (LPPIH) has immersed itself in the Franklin Park Neighborhood for over three years. We have learned firsthand that change happens at the speed of trust. We knew that real change begins with real listening. And we also knew it would take time to build the social capital to start engaging residents in meaningful conversations. But after three-plus years of neighborhood engagement work and coalition building with local partners, we leaped into the challenge of launching an expansive survey effort.

Enter the Flourishing Neighborhood Index (FNI) – a powerful community engagement process designed to gather holistic, place-based data while building trust and relationships with residents. Originally developed by Focused Community Strategies Urban Ministries, a nonprofit based in Atlanta, the FNI equips local partners with a framework to survey neighbors face-to-face across

12 indicators of neighborhood well-being, from housing and education to safety, belonging and civic infrastructure.

The Franklin Park Collaborative, through coordination from LPPIH, launched this process in Franklin Park in summer 2024. The goal was to survey 300 residents to better understand how they experience life in the Franklin Park neighborhood. At the time, we anticipated wrapping up the work in just three months. That was a year ago.

## Taking a deeper dive

What we thought would be a straightforward data collection initiative became something much deeper: a journey in relationship-building, trust-earning and showing up consistently. Over the past year, we've learned that data matters, but how we collect it and who we engage in the process matters just as much.

From the outset, we trained a dozen individuals – residents and local community-based organization representatives alike – to go into the community and conduct the survey. With such a committed collaborative, our mindset was, “Strength through numbers will make this quick.”

As with all good things in life, it didn’t go entirely as we planned.

We quickly learned this was anything but a fast task. The survey was really a 45- to 60-minute conversation with a community member. Language barriers added another layer of complexity. While Franklin Park is a majority-minority community, and Spanish-speaking, we only had a handful of trained Spanish-speaking surveyors.

No matter how many mailers we sent out or events we attended, even a \$20 VISA Gift Card as an incentive didn’t guarantee participation. What did? Showing up. Again, and again. On doorsteps, on sidewalks, at parks and in conversation.

We also discovered that assumptions about Franklin Park didn’t always match reality. The neighborhood is often described as transient, but survey after survey revealed some long-term residents; people who have lived here for five, 10, even 15 years. We were reminded that you can’t know a place until you ask the people who live there.

As the work progressed, our perspective shifted. Getting 300 surveys remained the goal, but each individual survey took on new meaning. Spending nearly an hour with a resident – talking, listening and learning – became more than just a data point. It became an investment in trust.

Relationship-building takes time. It takes authenticity. And it doesn’t always follow a straight path. But this slow, steady approach has proved to be deeply rewarding. It reminded us that in the rush to meet goals and track metrics, we must never lose sight of humanity in the work.

Throughout this journey, we’ve been grateful for the encouragement of our national partners at Congruence Consulting. David Park and Shawn Duncan have been steady allies offering training, tools and moral support when the work felt heavy. Their guidance and belief in the process kept us grounded and motivated, especially when momentum slowed.

To us, capturing community voice isn’t a box to check. It’s the foundation.

There is no story without data, and no data without story. The FNI helps us gather both, bringing dignity into the data collection process and ensuring residents that we not only hear them but also value them.

We’re proud of the persistence and perseverance shown by our partners and our LPPIH team. Some individuals have completed more than 30 surveys, going above and beyond, because they believe in the power of listening. This isn’t easy work, but it’s real and it’s rooted in respect.

As we close FY25 with more than 250 surveys completed, we’re entering the next phase: walking this data back to the community. In FY26, our focus will be on reflection and alignment. We’ll say to residents, “Here’s what we heard. Do you agree? What’s missing?” From there, we’ll begin shaping a shared community vision rooted in lived experience.

The long-term goal? A neighborhood plan created with residents, not for them. A plan grounded in data but also in trust, dignity and mutual ownership. We want neighbors to look at this information and say, “This reflects me. This reflects us.”

Because in Franklin Park, listening isn’t the end. It’s where transformation begins.



# Growing Health Together

## How Kellyn and LPPIH are growing health through trust, food and learning

For more than 15 years, the Kellyn Foundation has been investing in the health of Lehigh Valley communities. It's guided by a belief that everyone deserves access to fresh food, education and support to live well. Matching Kellyn's rich educational and produce offerings is its belief in the power of deep partnerships to provide services that center on the residents. Kellyn Foundation is a new partner in Allentown's Franklin Park neighborhood and has taken leaps toward a healthy food access strategy, which includes the "Eat Real Food" Mobile Market.

This isn't a new story, but rather the next step in one. It's the integration of a holistic organization with a neighborhood-focused approach. Kellyn's Healthy Neighborhood Immersion Strategy brings together education in schools, year-round food access, lifestyle change programs and community partnerships to create a neighborhood-wide framework for wellness. At the heart of this work is a vision: health begins in our homes, on our blocks and in our relationships.

### Vision becomes reality

In 2024, Kellyn expanded its long-standing mobile market initiative into Franklin Park, serving residents from two key neighborhood hubs: Resurrected Life Church (Tuesdays) and Pinebrook Family Answers (Thursdays). Due to construction at the church, the Tuesday market officially relocated to Franklin Park itself in June 2025, adding to the vibrancy of activity and events occurring in the park.

All three locations – Resurrected Life Church, Pinebrook Family Answers and Franklin Park – are within or near the Franklin Park neighborhood boundaries, reinforcing Kellyn's commitment to place-based, consistent support. The Mobile Market operates year-round and provides more than groceries; it offers community, connection and continuity.

"We're not new to this neighborhood," says Eric Ruth, Kellyn's CEO and co-founder. "We've built trust here over the years. The mobile market is just the latest iteration of that investment – and it's growing stronger every week."

In the final six months of 2024 alone, the market exceeded expectations, serving a cumulative 1,472 households and averaging 600 households per week – double the initial projections. More than 83 percent of participants were from households earning less than 30 percent of the area's median income, and over 75 percent identified as Hispanic.

This work was supported by an investment from the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health (LPPIH), which funded prescription food vouchers for neighborhood residents in the 18101 and 18102 ZIP codes. In 2025, Kellyn updated the voucher model to promote sustainability: participants contribute \$5 to receive \$15 worth of fresh, whole foods, payable via cash, credit or SNAP-EBT.

### A broad, interconnected scope

The mobile market is a gateway but not the destination. It connects directly with other Kellyn initiatives rooted in the Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being framework, specifically Basic Needs for Health and Safety and Lifelong Learning.

Over the past 10 years, Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) and Kellyn have had several different kinds of partnership, from school education and community canvassing to the delivery of meals and the Eat Real Food Mobile Market.

In the 2024–25 school year, over 950 students at Ramos, Hays and Central Elementary Schools – all surrounding Franklin Park – participated in Kellyn's in-classroom healthy lifestyle education. These programs, such as Eat Real Food, Healthy Choices and Eating Out Survival Skills, teach students to understand what real food is, read nutrition labels and make informed choices. The "Garden as a Classroom" program brings this learning outdoors, cultivating pride and the knowledge of how kids can grow their own food, which they bring home to their families.

Meanwhile, the Intensive Therapeutic Lifestyle Change Program launched in September 2024, offering adult residents a year-long, evidence-based pathway to better health through coaching, medical monitoring and behavior change. With new cohorts

launching in 2025, this initiative now partners with Highmark Wholecare to reach more residents managing type 2 diabetes or at-risk for the disease.

“You can’t do this work alone,” Ruth says. “Food is one piece. Behavior, housing, mental health – all of it matters. Our job is to create the infrastructure so other partners can plug in and build with us.”

This belief and mindset are consistent with the interdependence of the Vital Conditions framework. The conditions needed for residents to thrive cannot be disentangled: a neighborhood-based approach allows us to embrace the complexity of the various layers that impact well-being. This is consistent with our approach at LPPIH, where addressing one health driver alone will not move the needle forward toward a thriving neighborhood – but rather, all drivers collectively should be addressed.

For residents like Margarita Mercedes, the mobile market isn’t just about access to food, it’s a meaningful part of neighborhood life. A regular shopper since the market’s early days at Resurrected Life Church, Margarita now walks to Franklin Park every Tuesday. “I come because it helps me and others stay healthy,” Mercedes says. That vision of community empowerment is exactly what Kellyn hopes to nurture.

“The dream is that in five years, everyone in a green shirt running the market is from this neighborhood,” Ruth says. “That’s how you build real sustainability – when neighbors lead the work.”

We’re excited to see this work continue to flourish in the year ahead, deepening community connections and advancing health, one neighborhood at a time.





Leonard Parker Pool  
INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH

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