



Leonard Parker Pool
INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2026

Letter From the Executive Director

Reflections on the five-year mark for LPPIH, our progress, and vision forward

The summer of 2026 marks five years since the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health was established. Building on the legacy of the Dorothy Rider Pool Health Care Trust, LPPIH aims to improve the health of our region by addressing the community-level and structural conditions that shape health and well-being. This milestone offers an opportunity to reflect on how our work has evolved and where we are headed next. Over these five years, we have seen that lasting health improvement requires more than individual programs or interventions. We have embraced a place-based approach to health improvement that recognizes everyone should have access to the vital conditions—the resources and opportunities people need to thrive—within the places they call home.

This Annual Report reflects how that approach continues to take shape. In Allentown's Franklin Park neighborhood, our first neighborhood development focus, years of relationship-building and community engagement are producing visible results. Alongside physical improvements to the park and gathering spaces, we continue to strengthen the relationships, trust, and resident leadership that give those investments staying power. We continue to “water the soil” by investing in people and partnerships capable of working across sectors in innovative, co-creative ways to address housing, education, and workforce development. Together, these efforts are helping us demonstrate what place-based health improvement can accomplish while capturing lessons that extend beyond one neighborhood.

All of these efforts are with the long-term goal of improving people's ability to thrive and improve quality of life. LPPIH has taken the commitment to [The Rippel Foundation's Great Strides](#) goal of aiming for a 20-point improvement in thriving over the next decade. As we enter our next five years and continue our work as part of Jefferson's broader commitment to community health and impact, we remain focused on building the relationships, leadership and collective capacity that allow people and communities to thrive.

We are grateful to the neighbors, partners, funders and supporters who make this work possible. We look forward to what we will build together next.

Samantha Shaak, PhD

Executive Director, Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health

Our Values

The principles that guide how we serve.



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.

Holistic Neighborhood Development

Highlights from July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

- Completed the BUILD Health Challenge (2023-2026)
Resulted in the Families First in Franklin Park collaborative for early childhood education, the Uplift After School Program at Ripple Church, and the creation of the Franklin Park Parent Advisory Board.
- Received funding for the Franklin Park Housing Group
Funding from Enterprise Community Partners and the Siemer Institute, in partnership with United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, resulted in the hiring of new Housing Navigators and eviction prevention funding.
- Launched the first Civic Leadership Academy cohort
Led by Cohesion Network, the inaugural cohort includes 18 Allentown residents receiving training in civic leadership and what strong governance looks like.
- Provided data, evaluation and community engagement support for Allentown Works
LPPIH supports a \$20 million federal workforce development initiative serving three priority neighborhoods in Allentown, including Franklin Park.

Flourishing Neighborhood Index (FNI)

Priorities from a Franklin Park Neighborhood survey



TOP PRIORITIES

Ranked by the share of neighbors who identified each as a top priority for its community.



SAFETY

Safer streets, sidewalks and traffic calming

57%

OF RESPONDENTS



CLEANLINESS

Cleaner and better-maintained public spaces

47%

OF RESPONDENTS



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

More after-school programs and youth activities

46%

OF RESPONDENTS



HOUSING RESOURCES

Increased access to affordable housing resources and rental support

41%

OF RESPONDENTS



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

More job opportunities and workforce training

39%

OF RESPONDENTS



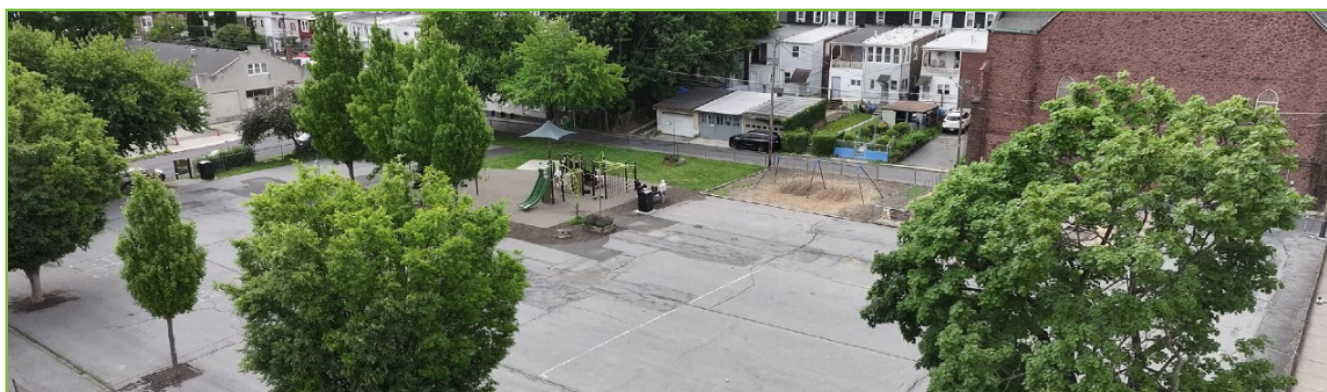
OUR
Franklin
Park



Year in Review (2025)

This year, the collaboration grew with the launch of Our Franklin Park and its website, OurFranklinPark.org. Developed as a collaborative neighborhood hub, OurFranklinPark.org brings together the work of over a dozen organizations, all serving the Franklin Park neighborhood.

A Community Vision for Franklin Park



For the past five years, residents and community partners in Franklin Park have worked together to strengthen relationships, build leadership opportunities and create a culture of neighborhood engagement. Through neighborhood meetings, collaborative events, community-led initiatives and ongoing conversations, neighbors have helped shape priorities for the future of their community with organizations committed to listening, building trust and working alongside residents.

This year, that investment in community engagement became visible in a new way through a redesign process of Franklin Park—one of the neighborhood's most important public assets.

Nestled between 14th and Franklin Street, Franklin Park serves as a centerpoint of neighborhood life. It is where children play, families gather, neighbors connect and community comes to life, but is missing a lot of functionality and convening spaces. As a vital community space, its future deserved to be shaped by the people who know it best.

The City of Allentown Department of Parks and Recreation had an opportunity to facilitate a redesign planning process, in which years of relationship-building became one of the project's greatest strengths. Rather than asking residents to react to a finished plan, the process invited neighbors to help create a shared vision from the beginning.

Through three public design meetings held between February and April 2026, residents were

invited to imagine what the park could become, provide feedback on evolving concepts and guide future planning. From the first visioning session to the presentation of the draft concept plan, neighbors shared their experiences, priorities and hopes for this central community space.

While conversations with residents were an essential part of the public design process, such convenings are hardly unique to Franklin Park. For four years, Cohesion Network and community partners had already been engaging residents in the neighborhood by breaking bread collectively through monthly Neighborhood Meetings.

"The root catalyst to meaningful change are the residents and neighbors in Franklin Park," said Darian Colbert, Executive Director of Cohesion Network. "Meaningful change starts with relationships. For years, we've gathered around the table, listened to one another and built trust. By the time the park redesign conversations began, residents weren't showing up because of a project—they were showing up because they already believed their voices mattered."

The response demonstrated what partnership between neighborhood groups and the city could look like.

Resident feedback helped shape a draft concept plan that includes expanded playgrounds for multiple age groups, a splash pad, a full-size basketball court, refreshed community gardens, flexible gathering and event spaces, walking paths, improved accessibility, open green space and other amenities. Together, these improvements support

opportunities for play, physical activity, community gathering and connection across generations.

The vision for Franklin Park reflects broader community priorities identified by residents and supported by findings from the Flourishing Neighborhood Index (FNI). Safe places for children and youth, welcoming green space, opportunities for neighbors to connect and environments that support health and well-being are essential ingredients of thriving neighborhoods. By bringing lived experience and local data together, project partners created a stronger foundation for thoughtful, equitable decision-making—and an investment in the future of Franklin Park itself.

Among those residents who were present and provided feedback was resident leader Amanda Cruz. “Being part of the park redesign has really opened up the lines of communication among local parents,” says Cruz. She continued, “It helped build awareness around what’s actually happening, gave everyone a realistic timeline, and kept the neighborhood in the loop. Having those open discussions at the meetings made sure every voice—young and old—was actually heard.”

As the City’s charitable partner for parks and recreation, the Allentown Parknership has helped expand opportunities for investment by pursuing additional philanthropic support—including a generous contribution from Phantoms Charities—to

help bring elements of the community’s vision to life.

Ruffian Tittmann serves as the inaugural Executive Director for The Allentown Parknership and has played an instrumental role in Franklin Park’s latest developments. “Meaningful community engagement as part of public-private partnerships is one of the key ingredients for philanthropic investment in parks,” says Tittmann. “Potential funders place a high value on opportunities where residents are actively shaping the future of their neighborhood combined with a shared commitment among organizational and municipal partners. Franklin Park has all this and more!”

Construction is anticipated to begin in late 2027, but the most important outcome may already be visible. The redesign of Franklin Park demonstrates what becomes possible when trust is built before projects begin, when organizations choose collaboration over competition and when residents are recognized as experts in their own neighborhood.

More than a redesign, the process reflects LPPIH’s belief that thriving neighborhoods are built through long-term investment in people, partnerships and place. The vision for Franklin Park was created with the community, and with local residents such as Amanda Cruz. That shared ownership will help shape the neighborhood long after construction is complete.



Capacity Building

One of LPPIH's priorities is to build capacity by translating national and local best practices into sustainable, collective solutions that foster health.

Through our Speaker Series, we bring leading voices and cutting-edge ideas to clinical and community partners. The series includes our annual community health symposium, hosted in a different LVHN part of Jefferson Health region each year, as well as additional presentations throughout the year.



Community Health Symposium

In November 2025, LPPIH, in coordination with LVHN, part of Jefferson Health, held its fourth annual [Community Health Symposium](#). This year, the symposium was held in the Pocono region. Sixty people from over ten different sectors and 22 local organizations convened to deepen relationships and share information, views, and ideas about how they could work together to address social determinants of health and improve community well-being. Local business, education, and health care leaders presented keynote addresses.

Participants spent the bulk of the day cycling through four break-out groups with topics that are pertinent to the Pocono region:

- 1.) Early Childhood Education, 2.) Food Insecurity,
- 3.) Housing, and 4.) Mental Health.

Some of the challenges to health that were uncovered during the symposium include: distance and transportation to services, technological barriers, navigating health insurance, stigma

associated with receiving care or support, and lack of trust of institutions. Participants discussed ideas for mitigating these challenges including: building outreach and trust; sharing information in multiple languages, places, and formats; paving the way to expand bilingual and culturally responsive staffing; and expanding community-based and mobile supports.

The day spent together created a shared experience for regional leaders to collaborate with additional organizations for better delivery of services within the region.

Housing, Education and Opportunity in the Lehigh Valley

In October 2025, LPPIH sponsored an event which was co-presented by the Urban Institute and Enterprise Community Partners. The presentation focused on how housing and education are part of the same complex web of systems and their combined impact on upward mobility from poverty. The presenters inspired attendees with examples of communities across the country where local partnerships have succeeded in fostering upward mobility.

This presentation helped to inform LPPIH's initial efforts toward driving positive housing outcomes through place-based approaches and collaboration and helped us identify opportunities for improving upward mobility.



Learning from National Leaders in Neighborhood Transformation



In April 2026, LPPIH brought a group of non-profit leaders, city, and healthcare partners to a site visit to REACH Riverside in Wilmington, DE. A member of the Purpose Built Communities Network, REACH Riverside has become a model for community-driven change through investments in housing, education, community health, and economic opportunity.

The visit offered participants an opportunity to see how a shared vision, sustained partnerships,

and resident leadership can collectively transform a neighborhood over time. While Wilmington's Riverside neighborhood has its own unique history, many of the lessons resonated with challenges and opportunities facing communities locally.

"REACH Riverside reinforced what's possible when organizations and residents commit to a common vision over time," said Marci Lesko, President and CEO of United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley. "Together, United Way and LPPIH are helping bring partners together to strengthen collaboration and create neighborhoods across the region where everyone has the opportunity to thrive."

One of the most valuable takeaways was the reminder that neighborhood transformation can take decades and is incremental. This type of complex systems change and neighborhood work requires patience, consistency, and commitment beyond any one organization or funding cycle.

Connecting the Work: Organizing Around Vital Conditions across the Lehigh Valley

On June 24, 2026, LPPIH partnered with The Rippel Foundation to host *Connecting the Work: Organizing Around Vital Conditions Across the Lehigh Valley*, bringing together leaders from healthcare, community-based organizations, and local philanthropy around a shared vision for community well-being. Using The Rippel Foundation's Well-Being Portfolio, participants explored how organizations with different missions can organize around the vital conditions and become more influential through shared stewardship.

"We have noticed a growing interest around the Vital Conditions framework," said Samantha Shaak, PhD, Executive Director at LPPIH. "It felt like an incredible opportunity to convene a cross-sector group, reinforce the room's interest, and make sure we move forward together as we work to create more opportunities for thriving."

Throughout the morning, participants recognized that while their organizations may approach community challenges differently, their work

contributes to the same goal: a future in which all people and places thrive together. Across sectors, each effort strengthens the interconnected conditions communities need to flourish. The gathering also highlighted LPPIH's ongoing partnership with The Rippel Foundation and strengthened connections among organizations working across the Lehigh Valley.

"Lehigh Valley stands out as a community filled with spirited stewards," said Bobby Milstein, Director of System Strategy at The Rippel Foundation. "More and more are turning toward each other, joining forces, and doing their parts to bring a thriving future to life."

By organizing around vital conditions and embracing shared stewardship, partners are building stronger relationships and creating the conditions needed for the Lehigh Valley to thrive together.

Fourth Cohort of ICT Facilitators Completed Training in FY '26

An impact report that captures the regional implementation of Integrative Community Therapy



163

Total ICT Sessions
("Rounds")



502

Participant
Responses



21

Organizations have
implemented an ICT "round"

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE



SAFE, OPEN, AND JUDGEMENT-FREE STATEMENTS

*"It was a safe space for sharing
and I felt seen and heard."*

*"The conversation was created in a safe space
and was definitely a chance to have those tough
conversations without the feelings of judgement."*



CONNECTION, BELONGING, AND COMMUNITY

*"The experience made me feel more a part of a
community, that I was not alone in my struggles."*

*"Such a good way to engage community, help
people make friends and connections."*

OUTCOMES & IMPACT



PRACTICAL GROWTH & COPING SKILLS

- Gained new coping strategies
- Learned from peers' lived experiences
- Developed new ways of thinking and reframing



EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- Stress relief and emotional release
- Calming and therapeutic experience
- Ongoing support through shared experiences



"PEARLS" FROM PARTICIPANTS



CONNECTION & SUPPORT

- Lean on others - you're not alone
- We heal in community



REFRAMING PERSPECTIVE

- Try to look at it from another perspective
- What can you learn from me?
- This moment doesn't define you



INTENTIONAL COPING STRATEGIES

- Walk, step away when overwhelmed
- Write things down to process your thoughts
- Use breathing, grounding techniques

CORE THEMES IDENTIFIED



SELF-COMPASSION & GRACE

- Give yourself grace
- You're doing the best you can with what you have
- Be gentle with yourself during hard moments



SETTING BOUNDARIES

- It's okay to say no
- Set boundaries to protect your peace
- You don't have to take on everything



MINDFULNESS & BEING PRESENT

- Take things one moment at a time
- Pause and breathe
- Stay present instead of worrying about what is next

LEARNINGS & CONSIDERATIONS



CHALLENGES NOTED

- Technology issues
- Discomfort with the model for first-time users



TOP ICT IMPLEMENTATION SITES

- Valley Youth House
- Lehigh County Jail
- Jefferson Health (TLC)
- Ripple Community Inc. (RCI)



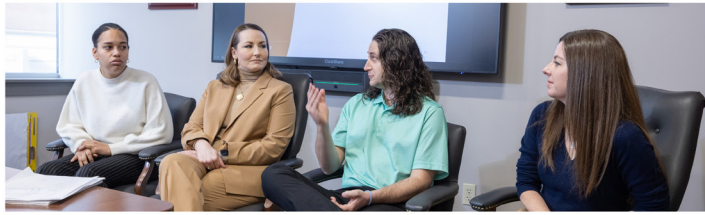
ICT expands access to mental health support by creating safe, community-driven spaces that strengthen connection, belonging, and resilience - especially where traditional services face access challenges.

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Pool Fellowship for Health Graduates its 11th Cohort of Leaders

Staff from LVHN, City of Allentown, and WDIY 88.1 FM among last years added fellows



Alicia Moyer
Avery Daniels
Braley Veras
Carol Noel Michaels
Erin Ludwig
Frank Messina
Kaitlyn Kelly
Lisandra Espiritusanto
Margaret McConnell
Melissa Starace
Sierra Valentino
Trevor Tormann



Inside the Institute



Arndt Promoted to Manager of Community Health Evaluation and Impact



Cheryl Arndt, PhD, joined LPPIH in 2022 and graduated from the Pool Fellowship's 8th cohort. In addition to leading the network's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), Arndt manages LPPIH's evaluation work of strategic partnerships and collaboration. As an acknowledgement of our growing data and evaluation efforts, this promotion recognizes her leadership to this work.

McCormick Joins LPPIH as Director of Community Health Innovations

Sean McCormick, PhD, MS, joined LPPIH in January 2026. He brings extensive experience in public health program leadership, having served as Associate Director of Public Health Programs at Latino Connection in Harrisburg, PA, Assistant Director at Health Promotion Council, Philadelphia, and as a postdoctoral fellow at Temple University's Center for Public Health Law Research. He is also a Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist.



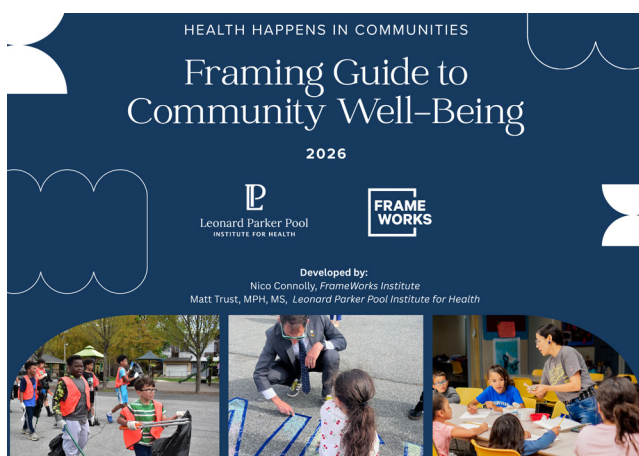
Trust Completes Master of Public Health from Lehigh University



LPPIH Community Engagement and Communications Specialist, Matt Trust, completed his Master of Public Health from Lehigh University's College of Health in May 2026. He began the program in Fall 2023 as part of Lehigh's second-ever cohort of MPH students. Trust's capstone was a semester-long, comprehensive program evaluation study of monthly neighborhood meetings in the Franklin Park neighborhood convened by Cohesion Network.

LPPIH Resources Hub

Available on [LPPIH.org/Resources](https://www.lppih.org/Resources)



Framing influences how people think, feel, and act on complex social issues both nationally and locally. When done well, it shifts conversations from individual blame and crisis thinking toward shared solutions, systems-level thinking, and community-led change. Created by LPPIH in partnership with Nico Connolly, Principal Strategist at FrameWorks Institute, [this guide](#) is designed to support LPPIH partners in framing complex issues in ways that resonate with the public and communities we serve in collaboration.

Places People Change: Neighborhood Engagement Resources

In partnership with Congruence Consulting, LPPIH helped develop *Places People Change*, a practical suite of resources designed to help communities build belonging, strengthen resident leadership, and create lasting neighborhood change. The collection includes a Quick Start Guide for those new to neighborhood-centered engagement, a comprehensive Blueprint outlining the methodology behind the approach, and a 101 Tools Toolkit filled with ready-to-use exercises, conversation guides, and engagement strategies. Grounded in real-world experience and lessons learned from neighborhood partnerships such as Franklin Park, these resources provide a practical roadmap for organizations, residents, and community leaders seeking to foster authentic relationships, shared action, and community well-being. A quick start guide, blueprint, and 101 tools are available on www.discovercongruence.com/resources/ for download.

Shaak and McConnell talk Vital Conditions on WDIY 88.1



The Well-Being Report is LPPIH's monthly radio program on WDIY 88.1 FM, co-hosted by Samantha Shaak and Margaret McConnell. Through conversations with residents, community leaders, and local organizations, the show explores the Vital Conditions that shape health and well-being in the Lehigh Valley. Topics from its 2025 season ranged from belonging and civic muscle to housing, education, meaningful work, mental health, and neighborhood leadership, helping listeners better understand the people, partnerships, and place-based efforts working to create thriving communities. The show's theme for 2026 is Belonging and Civic Muscle in action locally. Shows are available online at [LPPIH.org](https://www.lppih.org).

2025 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)

The [2025 Community Health Needs Assessment \(CHNA\)](#) provides a comprehensive look at the health and well-being of communities across the region. Developed by Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN), part of Jefferson Health, the assessment combines public health data with community perspectives to identify the most pressing health and social needs facing residents. The 2025 CHNA highlights the critical role of social drivers of health, including housing, education, employment, transportation, and community connectedness, and uses the Well-Being Portfolio framework to guide strategies that improve health outcomes and advance long-term well-being.

Building Community. Advancing Health.

TOGETHER, WE'RE CREATING PLACES WHERE EVERYONE CAN THRIVE



Fall Fest



Party in the Park



Bookbag Blast



Spring Carnival



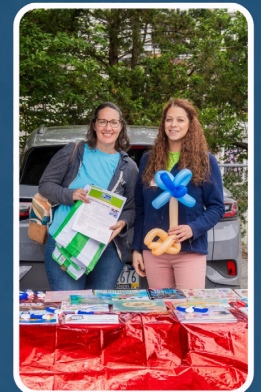
Earth Day Celebration



Phantoms Night



Uplift Thanksgiving



Trunk or Treat



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