



COMMUNITY STRATEGIES



INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Live Well Erie Community Strategies described here are part of the Live Well Erie Vision. The Live Well Erie Vision is organized around the singular idea that in the new Erie County we will leave no one behind and that all residents will have the chance to realize their full potential. A copy of the Live Well Erie Vision is available at livewellerie.com.

The strategies and initiatives in the following pages focus primarily on the social determinants of health--i.e. additional factors, not including health behaviors, that influence health outcomes, such as access to transportation, jobs and opportunity, and child care. The initiatives are the result of a collaborative effort between Erie County government and many Live Well Erie Community Partners who formed working groups for each of the three populations to be served: Children, Working Families, and Seniors. The working groups brainstormed initiatives that would help each population achieve the goals outlined in the Live Well Erie Vision. Progress towards the goals will be measured by changes in the data indicators attached to each goal.

The Live Well Erie Community Strategies is a fluid document. The included initiatives are not set in stone and will change depending on how well they actually support progress towards the goals. Erie County, together with the Live Well Erie Community Partners, have formed the Live Well Erie Task Force. The Task Force will have the responsibility of monitoring progress towards each of the goals. If progress towards our goals is not being made, current initiatives and community strategies will be reconsidered and may be replaced with new ones. As such, the Live Well Erie Community Strategies will be a continually evolving effort to improve the lives of our residents.

Thank you for your interest in the Live Well Erie Community Strategies. For more information about the Live Well Erie Vision or for information about how to become a Live Well Erie Community Partner, please visit: livewellerie.com.

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A CHANCE TO SUCCEED

GOAL 1: CHILDREN WILL GROW UP IN A STABLE, SAFE, AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

1.1 Improve services by implementing evidence based models including Trauma Informed Care and Strengthening Families

Erie County will implement system-wide improvements to how services are delivered to children and their families. These efforts will incorporate the Strengthening Families Model and Trauma Informed Care. Phase one of this effort will include facilitating and promoting training opportunities on the models and creating learning collaboratives to support coordination. This initiative will leverage expertise within the county, in the provider community, and in higher education to support and guide the activities. A summary of each of the models is below.

Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. Trauma Informed Care also emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both consumers and providers, and helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care affiliated with the University at Buffalo School of Social Work will be a key partner for this effort.

Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs, and communities to build five key Protective Factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Children's social and emotional competence





1.2 Focus on reducing gun violence using multi-pronged approach

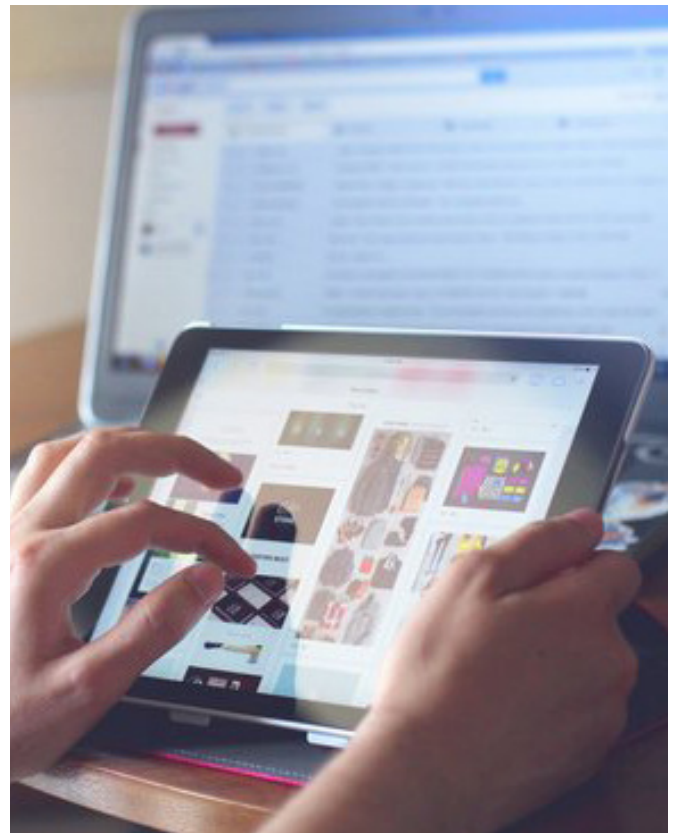
This is a three-pronged initiative. The first prong is the Erie County partnership with Crime Stoppers that will implement a billboard campaign to “Stop the Violence” and enhanced rewards for information leading to an arrest and prosecution in fatal or non-fatal shootings.

The second is to promote Project ChildSafe and the availability of gun locks through local law enforcement. Jurisdictions will be encouraged to participate in Project Childsafe. This initiative has immediate safety results and prevents accidental discharge of firearms and is also an effective element to suicide prevention targeting means reduction.

The third prong of this initiative is to continue to work with the Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) initiative. GIVE is funded by New York State and provides local law enforcement with resources and training to improve public safety, using data and evidence based strategies.

1.3 Internet safety education for children, youth and parents

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children has staff dedicated to local community outreach who specialize in the delivery of the KidSmartz and NetSmartz safety curricula. These safety education programs for parents, children, law enforcement and other professionals are delivered in schools, to community groups, day care centers and other venues. The curricula is also available online. The County will partner with schools and community organizations serving children and families to increase access to this important training. In addition to the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, partners on this initiative will include schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, after school programs, and agencies that provide services to children and families that contract with the County. Agencies will be asked to track the number of trainings and how many people have participated in training.



GOAL 2: CHILDREN WILL ACHIEVE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

2.1 Implement a countywide wellness initiative on healthy eating and physical activity, particularly in Erie County Parks

In partnership with the Live Well Western New York program, Erie County and our partners will be active in the Live Well Western New York initiative. Erie County is able to

provide access to our extensive Parks System and resources in our many departments that address health and mental health. The County also is uniquely positioned for outreach to special populations including children, families, seniors, and those that have a disability. Through this outreach we will increase the use of the Park Passports, trail system, the ranger program, and the senior's hiking club.



2.2 Implement the Ages and Stages Questionnaire countywide to help identify social-emotional and developmental delays in young children and link families to available services to address delays

Erie County will support and facilitate broader implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) throughout Erie County. Screening is important to detect delays early, improve child outcomes, and encourage parent involvement and education. Screening is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Head Start, and Medicaid Child Health Program. The ASQ is reliable and has been rigorously tested. The model also includes social-emotional screening and parent focused activities. This initiative will be implemented in phases: Phase 1 to assess current use of the ASQ throughout the county; Phase 2 to identify organizational readiness and interest in implementing ASQ; and Phase 3 to support training and implementation of ASQ in new organizations and settings.



2.3 Expanded training for early childhood teachers

The early childhood community is often on the front lines of addressing trauma, strengthening families, and supporting protective factors, thus it needs investment in training that will help build resilience in children. Erie County supports the expansion of the connection of the Pyramid Model and Protective Factors Framework training.

The Pyramid model strongly supports Trauma Informed Care. Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding appropriately to the effects of all types of trauma. It does this by operating within the 5 principles of trauma informed care: Safety, Communication, Trustworthiness, Collaboration, and Empowerment.

Protective Factors Training includes: Parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.

The training will support the early childhood provider's ability to help build resilience in children who have been affected by traumatic stress. The child care providers are then positioned to recognize traumatic stress and take the necessary steps to intervene by using healing strategies that foster resilience.

2.4 Convene Community stakeholders to adopt the National Infant and Toddler Collaborative

County government plays a critical role in breaking multi-generational cycles of poverty, especially as it relates to early childhood development. Erie County plays a major role in shaping early childhood systems and investing in core services for infants and toddlers that help support positive outcomes for young children.

The first three years of a child's life are the foundation of brain development. Neuroscience has demonstrated that the most rapid period of brain development occurs within the first three years of life - more than at any other point. These growth spurts lay the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. By investing in young children early, Erie County has an opportunity to deliver high-quality services with higher returns and reduce the need for more expensive interventions later and invest in core policies and services that help to shape early childhood systems.



Erie County will convene community stakeholders to adopt The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) model. NCIT is a prenatal to age three outcomes framework focused on increasing the number of young children who are developmentally on track for Kindergarten. To achieve this goal the collaborative supports pregnant women and young children with high quality, accessible health services, family support and early childhood education. The initiative will also include work on focusing on reducing black infant mortality rates, addressing homelessness among pregnant women, increasing coaching, support, and resources for child care providers and increasing developmental screenings in children of color, including immigrants and refugees.

In New York State, 229,737 infants were born in 2017. In Erie County, 9,870 infants were born in 2017. This is the mandate to start this work to advance programs and policies that promote healthy development from day one.

NCIT funded through the Pritzker Children's Initiative brings together national partners, early childhood leaders, philanthropy, policymakers and practitioners inside and outside state and local governments to create and strengthen promising policies and programs, and share what works, so that more states and communities can support the healthy development of our youngest children.

Erie County will be a member of the learning collaborative.



The National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers (NCIT) is committed to advancing the most promising policies and programs that ensure families have the supports they may need in the following key areas:

Healthy Beginning: A healthy beginning starts before birth with a healthy mother. To improve chances for a strong start in life, all expectant mothers need access to comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, and access to preventive and comprehensive health care for

their infants. Preventive and comprehensive health care includes regular well-child visits, screenings, and referrals to necessary services to ensure infants are born healthy and continue to thrive.

Supported Families: The most effective way to support a young child is through their family. For healthy development, infants and toddlers need high-quality health care, stimulating learning opportunities, and nurturing, responsive relationships. A system of supports for families, such as home visiting should be in place to reach every parent and child at or before birth with needed information, assessments, and referrals that offer each child a strong beginning.

High-Quality Child Care & Learning: All infants and toddlers should experience nurturing and responsive care in safe and stable settings. High-quality child care—whether it takes place in a child care center, or with home-based providers—should provide developmental appropriate practices that are interactive and stimulate engagement, building a solid foundation during the first three years. Caregivers must have a high level of training, knowledge and skills, a positive attitude, and a good understanding of child development.



GOAL 3: CHILDREN WILL REALIZE THEIR GREATEST POTENTIAL

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

3.1 Assess the availability of Universal Pre-K and student success throughout Erie County

Access to quality early childhood learning experiences are fundamental to a child's development. According to Deborah Stipek, Ph.D.,¹ Preschool is valuable for 3 primary reasons:

■ *Preschool helps children develop important social and self-regulation skills:*

Children need to interact with a large number of same-aged peers to develop skills that will help them succeed at school. These skills include listening, sharing, and waiting, taking turns, and even learning how to lose (for example, in a game). Children also need to learn school-related behaviors to help them thrive in the classroom, such as paying attention, following directions, and completing tasks. In particular, current research shows that self-regulation (the ability to control one's behavior, attention, and emotions) is a strong predictor of early success in school.

■ *Preschool lays the foundation for brain development and future learning:*

There is no other time in a child's life when there is more growth in the areas of the brain used for higher cognitive functions such as impulse control, attention, memory, and reasoning than during the first five years. These cognitive functions make it easier for children to interact with other children, engage in problem solving, following rules, and plan



and manage their time. Research has shown that how well kids have developed these basic skills before entering kindergarten can predict school success later in life. Investing in high-quality preschool environments that help children learn is more efficient and effective than trying to remedy learning problems later on.

■ *Preschool benefits society as well as individual children*

There is consistent and compelling evidence of the long-term, cost-savings benefits of preschool. High-quality programs, such as those developed in Boston and Tulsa, have produced gains of between a half and a full year of additional learning in reading and math. Although some studies have found that this improvement in academic skills is no longer evident after second grade, most studies have documented immediate overall academic advantages. Many studies have also found that even if the achievement advantage disappears, children who attend preschool are less likely to need special education services, repeat a grade, drop out of high school, and

¹ Early Childhood Memory and Attention as Predictors of Academic Growth Trajectories (2014).

even be incarcerated as adults. Overall, the benefits of preschool outweigh the costs for both middle-class children and economically disadvantaged children, although most studies find that children from low-income families benefit more, perhaps because they enter preschool with relatively lower skills on average.

3.2 Implement strategies that support student success at every stage of development, including convening a Community Impact Committee comprised of a cross section of community stakeholders

The Community Impact Committee will include: Help Me Grow WNY, National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers, the Mindfulness Alliance, Say Yes Buffalo, BOCES, the Health Foundation for WNY, Child Advocacy Center Buffalo and WNY, the United Way, WNY School District Leadership, University at Buffalo School of Social Work, Buffalo Urban League, Crisis Services, and Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo.

The Community Impact Committee will convene: monthly for one year to assess the availability of Universal Pre-K throughout Erie County and create a Mindfulness Advisory Team to inform policy and practice that will support successful learning transitions for children, throughout their Pre-K, elementary and secondary education. Additionally, the committee will identify gaps in services and develop an action agenda to include creating linkages to existing programs and services, conduct research on best practices, and developing a strategic plan for the implementation of two key programs; Universal Pre-K and Mindfulness Education.



3.3 Create a Mindfulness Advisory Team to inform policy and practice that will support successful learning transitions for children, throughout their pre-K, elementary and secondary education

Mindfulness in schools is increasingly popular, and programs, interventions, and accompanying research on mindfulness in schools are increasing exponentially. Pre-adolescence is a key developmental period in which complex intrinsic volitional methods of self-regulation are acquired as a result of rapid maturation within the brain networks underlying the self-regulatory processes of attention control and emotion regulation. *Fostering adaptive self-regulation skills during this stage of development has strong implications for physical health, emotional and socio-economic outcomes during adulthood.*

At its most basic level, mindfulness helps train your attention to be more aware of what is actually happening, rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen. We learn to bring greater curiosity to our experiences.² Mindfulness trains us to direct our attention to whatever is happening in the present moment: our breathing, other physical sensations, thoughts, emotions, or everyday activities like walking and eating. This awareness means we can respond more skillfully to whatever the present-moment throws at us.

Mindfulness in schools can help young people to manage difficulties and flourish despite them. And it can also help their teachers.

As well as helping them to recognize worry, manage difficulties and cope with exams, developing a more mindful awareness also helps children and young people to appreciate what is going well and to flourish

Mindfulness trains us to understand and direct our attention with greater awareness and skill. This may improve the capacity of children to concentrate and be less distracted, as well as their working memory and ability to plan. Mindfulness curriculum and programs help to develop a greater awareness of relationships and how to manage them (including difficult ones at home), as well as offering a richer understanding of things like self-esteem and optimism as well as help students self-regulate more effectively, manage impulsivity and reduce conflict and oppositional behavior.



2 Mindfulness in Schools Project- <https://mindfulnessin-schools.org>

EMPOWERING WORKING FAMILIES

GOAL 1: FAMILIES IN ERIE COUNTY WILL HAVE SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

(AS DEFINED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT)

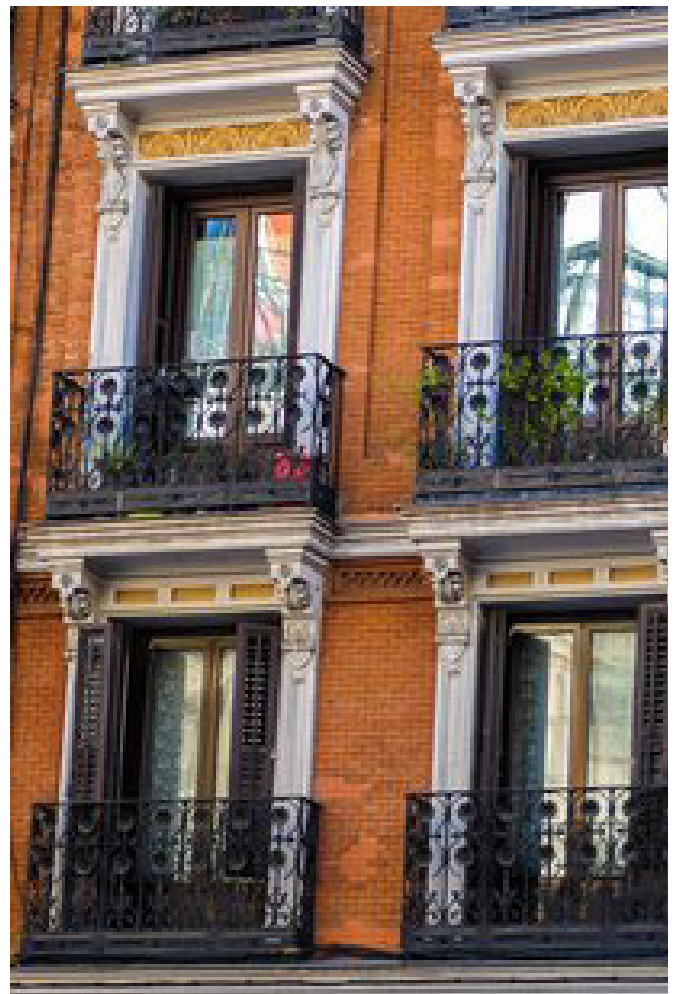
Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

1.1 Pass affordable housing policy for adaptive reuse projects receiving tax incentives at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA)

The Erie County Industrial Development Agency passed an Adaptive Reuse Policy in 2008. The Policy was meant to incentivize the productive reuse of previously vacant and abandoned properties. It has been a useful tool for accomplishing exactly that. In most instances, the property has been adaptively reused to develop market rate housing units in downtown Buffalo.

A great deal has changed in the decade since the policy was developed and approved by ECIDA. A resurgence in the WNY economy, increased housing prices, and the addition of many more market rate units in the downtown corridor has occurred. As such, policy makers are developing an amendment to the ECIDA Adaptive Reuse Policy that would require, under certain circumstances, and with county support, the inclusion of some affordable housing units (defined as 80% of area media income) in those adaptive reuse projects that produce 10 or more units of housing.

While this policy is not likely to add a significant number of affordable units to the local housing market, it will ensure that tax dollars are no longer used to simply subsidize market rate and luxury apartments.



1.2 Partner with the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation (BENLIC) on the rehabilitation of more owner-occupied affordable housing properties

The Erie County Department of Environment and Planning will explore the possibility of working with BENLIC to increase affordable housing by targeting homebuyers and renters of properties obtained by BENLIC through the County auction process who have household incomes just above the federal poverty level. BENLIC currently identifies county owned properties at auction to rehabilitate and sell many of these homes to families whose income qualifies as being part of the ALICE population. BENLIC is currently looking to explore the possibility of working with additional partners such as Habitat for Humanity, to sign over foreclosed properties to those partners so they could rehabilitate them and sell them to households that would meet the ALICE population guidelines. The County could provide funding to BENLIC to increase the number of foreclosed properties that could be rehabilitated and sold to households living at 80-120% of the area medium income. The funding could be used to cover the initial costs of acquiring a property at auction, insuring it, stabilizing it and maintaining it, until it is rehabbed by BENLIC or transferred to a non-profit to be rehabbed.



1.3 Increase federal Home Investment Partnership (HOME) funding from HUD to continue to build new units of affordable rental housing

Erie County will increase federal Home Investment Partnership (HOME) funding to continue to build new units of affordable rental housing. Federal funding for the HOME grant to Erie County has increased in 2018 and 2019 and that will enable the county to fund these projects.



1.4 Educate municipal Planning Boards on strategies to increase affordable housing in their municipalities

Erie County will educate Municipal Planning Boards on strategies to increase affordable housing in their municipalities. Strategies will include: the sale of county owned properties and land to developers in a trade for low income, accessible housing; provide density bonuses to developers for all new construction projects whereby the developer is allowed more overall units than what was approved if they have a certain amount of the units be at affordable rents; adopt an inclusionary zoning policy that requires certain percentage of low-income

households in a new housing project, look to reform the procedures for permits to lower developers' costs for projects as a tradeoff to increase affordable housing units.

1.5 Explore the possibility of creating Limited Equity Cooperatives (LEC) to fund low interest mortgages and property tax reductions for the purpose of selling units in apartment buildings to low income households

Create a task force to explore the possibility of having local non-profit housing providers manage Limited Equity Cooperatives (LEC). The LEC model provides non-profits with funding for low interest mortgage rates and property tax reductions to sell units in apartment

buildings to low income households. The low income household would purchase shares in the LEC that owns the building and those shares would cover paying property taxes and operating costs for the LEC. The LEC in return would keep the rent at affordable levels while that household resides in the unit. If the renter moves and sells the unit they cannot sell the unit for profit. The goal of an LEC is to keep rents affordable for low income households and to maintain a high quality of life for renters as they own their unit and have an increased sense of upkeep and care of the building. LEC's were more common in the 1960's when there were more federal funds to assist LEC's with the acquisition and rehab of the purchase of an apartment building. However, LEC's are making a comeback in recent years as housing prices have risen and home ownership has become harder to reach.



1.6 Explore increased weatherization opportunities for families using HEAP

Create a Working Families Resource Center (physical or virtual) that could be in part sponsored by utility vendors. The center would assist families in seeking out energy efficiency programs such as weatherization, and the New York Energy Smart Program, along with the NYS Utility Cost Program which helps certain households qualify for a 3% reduction in their gas and electric bill each month. These programs are designed to assist households with reducing residential energy costs. A Resource Center could provide residents with classes or trainings on these programs to increase participation. The goal is long term reductions in utility costs for renters and landlords, which consequently stabilized the amount of money low and moderate income families spend on housing.



1.7 Remediate lead hazards in homes through the Department of Environment and Planning Housing Rehabilitation Program in Erie County's Community Development Consortium areas and through the Erie County Health Department in the City of Buffalo.

Erie County's Department of Health will continue to conduct approximately 70 cases of lead remediation projects (70 households) per year in households where children under the age of 6 have tested positively for high levels of lead, largely in the City of Buffalo. The Health Department will have contractors complete remediation work inside and outside of these homes and the home will be left completely free of all lead hazards. The County's Department of Environment and Planning Community Development Rehab Program will continue to operate similarly in the community development consortium areas, providing lead remediation to approximately 80 additional homes per year.

GOAL 2: FAMILIES IN ERIE COUNTY WILL HAVE GREATER FINANCIAL SECURITY

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

2.1 Use Erie County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create a PIVOT Resource Map to identify clusters of employers participating in the PIVOT program and their proximity to both transportation lines and childcare centers

Erie County Department of Social Services' (DSS) Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training (PIVOT) program is a unique wage subsidy program designed to connect the local business with workforce needs and welfare recipients in need of jobs. The goal of the PIVOT program is to provide incentives to employers to hire clients with multiple barriers and those that may need more time for on-the-job-training. The employer receives a six-month wage subsidy in exchange for providing on-the-job-training to the welfare recipient and agrees to hire the client as a permanent employee after the training has concluded.

The successful program currently places over 350 clients and engages more than 300 employers. But two major obstacles prevent the program from growing and serving both would-be clients and employers; transportation and childcare.

The PIVOT Resource Map will modernize and advance the current PIVOT program by using Erie County's Division of Geographic Information Systems to plot existing relevant data including participating employers, would-be employers, existing childcare centers, the American Community Survey's Zero Vehicle Household data, and current Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) routes to accomplish the following goals:

Identify Employer Clusters to Facilitate Transportation Options: The Resource Map will allow DSS to locate and identify concentrations of employer sites as clusters. The clusters will be used to develop or validate possible new NFTA routes and, or privately chartered bus routes, as well as organize a critical mass of would-be employer participants into existing or newly formed employer clusters.

Identify Available Childcare Centers in Proximity to Employer Clusters: The Resource Map will plot childcare center locations to find available childcare in closest proximity to the employer clusters. This will assist in identifying suitable childcare options accessible to DSS clients.

By improving transportation options and locating proximate childcare centers, the PIVOT Resource Map will allow the program to include employers not already on transportation routes and provide greater employment options to participants with a wide variety of existing and developing skills.



2.2 Work with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and its members on “opt out” and other retirement saving initiatives for workers

Many American families are overwhelmed by the financial challenges of day to day life and are more worried about making it until pay day than they are about saving for retirement. And yet, saving for retirement is essential to achieving financial stability, especially since less than 13% of Americans earn pensions at their job.

Many workers are presented with the opportunity to save for retirement at their initial time of hiring but many workers choose not to. “Opt-out” retirement plans can assist in getting more workers to save for retirement. An opt-out plan is an employer-sponsored retirement savings program that automatically enrolls a company’s employees into either a 401(k) or simple IRA. Companies enroll eligible employees into a default allocation at a set contribution rate, usually starting around 3% of wages. Employees that want a different contribution or who do not want to take part must take some sort of action to undo the default settings.

Erie County’s Departments of Social Services, Senior Services, and Public Advocacy will work with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership to educate employers about this alternative retirement savings model for employees. Ideally, a few select employers will pilot the “opt-out” model and report back on its success in getting more employees to



save for retirement. Depending on outcomes, this pilot effort may be used to encourage more employers to shift to an opt-out model.

2.3 Explore strategies to grow the number of employers in Erie County offering paid sick leave to their low and moderate income employees

Nearly all workers in Erie County will, at



some time during each year, need to take limited time off from work to attend to their own health needs or the health needs of their family members. However, there is currently no requirement that employers provide sick leave to workers in Erie County. Over fifty percent of respondents to a recent survey administered by Erie County, reported that they attended work while sick in the previous 12 months due to lack of paid sick time. Nationally, nearly forty percent of private sector workers do not have access to paid sick time. The situation is even worse for low-wage workers; in Erie County, over sixty-five percent of low-wage workers do not receive paid sick leave. Lack of paid sick leave leads to job insecurity for working families, a less productive workforce, and an unhealthy public.

Greater access to paid sick leave would have far-reaching positive effects on employees, businesses, and Erie County’s public health. Workers would no longer fear being fired simply because they became sick or stayed home to care for their sick child. Employers

would similarly benefit, as providing paid sick leave results in reduced worker turnover which, in turn, leads to reduced costs incurred from advertising, interviewing and training new hires.

Moreover, paid sick time would positively impact the public health of Erie County by promoting workplace health and safety and ensuring employees are not forced to work with an illness that could endanger themselves or others. Currently, over thirty counties, cities, and states across the country have successfully implemented paid sick leave legislation that guarantees this important benefits to workers within their jurisdictions. Westchester County and New York City have already passed such laws, and Albany County is currently considering its own paid sick leave bill. Erie County will convene an advisory committee to explore strategies to grow the number of employers in Erie County offering paid sick leave to their low and moderate income employees.

2.4 Establish a Re-entry Hub to support employment opportunities and financial security for recently incarcerated individuals

Originally conceived as an initiative of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, Erie County Department of Mental Health's division of Forensic Mental health will establish a "Re-entry Hub". The Hub will be located at 120 West Eagle, physically around the corner from the Erie County Holding Center where inmates are released from incarceration. The Hub will serve as a one-stop shop for those individuals leaving incarceration and re-entering the community. Erie County will partner with the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, the Erie County Sheriff's office, the Erie County Department of Social Services and many community-based, non-profit service providers to assist recently released individuals in securing health insurance, food, housing, job training, employment, treatment services, and more.

The Re-entry Hub should help assist individuals with their successful reintegration into the community and consequently, improve their quality of life. Use of best practices at the Hub will allow individuals to live independently and help prevent them from returning to jail.

2.5 Establish an Erie County Live Well Mobile Services Van to better connect residents throughout the county to county services

Many residents throughout the county struggle to access county services. This is true for families with children, working adults, and our seniors, especially those living in the rural parts of Erie County. Approved as part of the 2019 Erie County Budget, Erie County will launch its first ever Mobile Services van to take county services directly to residents in the community. The Departments of Social Services, Senior Services, Health, Veterans Affairs, and others will all be represented on the van. Residents will be able to sign up for SNAP, WIC, Meals on Wheels, HEAP, health insurance counseling, and more. A schedule identifying the dates, times, and locations of the van will be available on the County's website at www.erie.gov.



GOAL 3: FAMILIES IN ERIE COUNTY WILL HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

3.1 Increase awareness of available daycare subsidy programs (Erie County Department of Social Services low income subsidy, Workforce Development Institute).

Childcare is more expensive than college in Erie County. There are programs available to help residents pay for childcare, including for those who make up to 200% of the federal poverty level. Erie County Department of Social Services will work with our partners to inform residents of ways to get help paying for child care through the use of social media, community outreach events, childcare providers, the Child Care Resource Network and employers.

3.2 Collaborate with the Child Care Resource Network and develop a checklist – easy to follow, step by step guide or requirements and timeline for becoming a childcare provider.

Parents and guardians in Erie County need high-quality childcare so they can go to work every day. Starting your own child care business is a big commitment. While it provides a way for you to work from home, be your own boss, work with children, and provide a safe place for children to come every day, there is a lot that goes into being a child care provider. Erie County Department of Social Services will partner with the Child Care Resource Network to inform interested residents on the steps to

starting a child care business. This will be phase 1 of a multistage initiative.

Child care providers are the heart and soul of early education. Because of hardworking, dedicated professionals in the childcare field, children have access to high quality care and learning where they are safe, happy and healthy. Erie County will collaborate with the Child Care Resource Network to develop an easy to follow step by step guide of requirements for becoming a child care provider. Phase 1 shared general information on opening a home daycare via workshops. This will be phase 2 of the initiative which provides hands on tools and a timeline for start up.



3.3 Incentivize participation of Erie County childcare providers in QUALITYstarsNY (NY's childcare Quality Rating and Improvement System)

QUALITYstarsNY is New York State's voluntary 5-Star early childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System. Since its inception, QUALITYstarsNY has focused its evidence-based practices to ensure that young children in participating programs have access to excellence and families can trust the level of quality in the program they choose. Assessment, coaching, professional development, and a wide range of resources are made available to each site, which enables QUALITYstarsNY to support early childhood programs to earn higher star ratings.

The QUALITYstarsNY Standards were developed by leading experts in the field of early childhood development and learning across New York State to provide a common framework for the elements of high quality early childhood care and education programs. A program's rating is determined using a point system based on 75 different indicators, resulting in a one- to five-star rating with "five stars" denoting the highest quality. An independent evaluation of a site's classrooms or a provider's home using the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) tool is used to augment the rigor of the point system.

Erie County will encourage participation of childcare providers in QUALITYstarsNY. Currently, QUALITYstarsNY serves approximately 804 center –based programs, family-home providers, and public schools in targeted communities across the state. Only 69 are in Erie County.

3.4 Work with Erie County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to plot existing child care centers throughout the county and then work with employers, healthcare providers, and schools to share information about the location of quality childcare and available options

The Child Care Resource Map will plot childcare center locations in Erie County. This will assist in identifying childcare options accessible to families and areas where a "child care desert" exists. Information will be shared across multiple venues and will be used with the previous initiative to encourage the development of new childcare centers in those deserts.



SUPPORT FOR OUR SENIORS

GOAL 1: OLDER ADULTS WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN AN ACTIVE AND STIMULATING SOCIAL LIFE AS THEY AGE.

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

1.1 Offer dinner at Senior Centers / Go Dine program

Erie County's Department of Senior Services congregate dining programs are traditionally offered at select locations, such as senior centers, community centers, religious institutions and senior housing facilities. Menus are pre-determined weeks in advance and participants are served in a cafeteria-type fashion with little opportunity for choice. However, today's older adults are more likely to participate in new, choice-driven opportunities rather than the more structured nature of traditional congregate dining programs.

Erie County will expand the congregate dining program to include select local restaurants as dining options. The program will allow eligible older adults the option of dining out at a participating food establishment with whomever they choose to dine with and select from a menu of pre-fixed meal options that are made to order. This program is made possible through a federal grant provided through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Go Dine Erie program offers older adults in Erie County expanded access to nutrition and additional options for community engagement.

Along with seniors' nutritional needs, the program is meant to address a number of



growing issues among older adults as aging services' networks move towards a self-directing style. The restaurant congregate dining program will provide a new choice for individuals to eat well-balanced meals at their convenience. Participants may wish to utilize their benefit in conjunction with others such as friends, family, and neighbors, thereby helping to minimize the prevalence of social isolation. Interacting with other customers and restaurant staff is intended to promote intergenerational connections and increased community engagement.

1.2 Offer older adult technology training through Buffalo and Erie County Public Library

Although technology can improve the quality of life, older adults are often reluctant to learn or adopt it. About one-third of Americans ages 65 and older don't use the internet, according to a study last year by the Pew Research Center. Even among those who use it, roughly one-third aren't confident when performing tasks online.

As society moves to be more electronically connected, older adults feel isolation due to not being technologically literate. They are unable to communicate with family members, watch videos of their grandchildren, or keep up with the news. Services that might allow him or her remain independent, such as grocery shopping online, is out of reach.

The Department of Senior Services, and its partner agencies, will work with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library to give free classes for seniors to learn how to access information online. These classes will not be limited to library buildings. They will include senior centers throughout Erie County.



GOAL 2: ERIE COUNTY WILL BE ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND PHYSICAL ABILITIES

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

2.1 Explore with the Erie County Industrial Development Agency the possibility of creating a policy requiring senior housing and other public spaces to meet universal design standards

Many built environments in Erie County are not inclusive of the diverse abilities of our population. When public spaces are inaccessible to a member of our community, due to a range of factors including age and disability, he or she feels stigmatized and withdraws from public life.

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. Everyone benefits if an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use. By considering the diverse needs and abilities of all throughout the design process, universal design creates products, services and environments that meet peoples' needs. Universal design is good design.

The **Eight Goals of Universal Design** are:

- **Body fit:** Accommodate a wide range of body sizes and abilities
- **Comfort:** Keep demands within desirable limits of body function
- **Awareness:** Ensure that critical information for use is perceived easily
- **Understanding:** Make methods of operation and use intuitive, clear, and unambiguous
- **Wellness:** Contribute to health promotion, avoidance of disease, and prevention of injury
- **Social integration:** Treat all groups with dignity and respect
- **Personalization:** Incorporate opportunities for choice and the expression of individual preferences
- **Cultural appropriateness:** Respect and reinforce cultural values and the social and environmental context of any design project

Taxpayers support the creation of public spaces directly (e.g., public parks), through public support (e.g., grants to public organizations), and through tax exemptions and abatements for private organizations (e.g., retail establishment). Currently, there is no requirement that the public space funded by taxpayers be designed to be accessible by all taxpayers. The Amherst IDA has implemented a policy that new senior housing must be built in accordance with universal design standards to qualify for its program.



2.2 Perform a crowdsourced walk audit of all Erie County roadways in commercial or densely populated residential areas

Erie County's Department of Public Works is responsible for the engineering and inspection of over a thousand miles of roadways. These roadways are not always friendly to pedestrians, and they create challenges to older adults who do not drive. Without the ability to safely be a pedestrian in his or her community, an older adult is more likely to be socially isolated and less likely to be physically active. This can cause depression and physical ailments.

In order to develop a plan to improve pedestrian accessibility along Erie County roadways, Erie County, in coordination with volunteer and civil groups, will conduct a walk audit along Erie County roadways that are either zoned commercial or have a large number of residential units. A walking audit is an unbiased examination/evaluation of the walking environment. The general purpose of the walking audit is to identify concerns for pedestrians to the safety, access, comfort, and convenience of the environment. This survey will allow Erie County residents to crowdsource the information needed to solve the problems that exist.

After the walk audit is complete, Erie County will work with advocacy organizations and other interested parties to prioritize action steps Erie County can take to improve the pedestrian experience along its roadways.



2.3 Develop and distribute a Senior Transportation Connector Card that lets older adults use numerous modes of transportation

Erie County is a great place to live with a wonderful mix of rural, urban and suburban places to enjoy festivals, the scenic waterfronts, parks and so much more. Erie County residents value the independence to go where we want and when we want to go. According to the National Aging And Disability Transportation Center the impact of having to “give up the keys” is a major, often negative, life event for many older adults. Accessible transportation services are critical for enabling older adults to live independently. The vast majority of older adults – nearly 90%, according to AARP – choose to age in place in their homes and communities. Without accessible, reliable and affordable transportation options, many more older adults could face the possibility of placement in a long-term facility.

Erie County will work to ensure that older adults are not left behind in the New Live Well Erie County due to transportation. We will work with our partners to create a Connector Card program that will provide subsidized transportation funds for eligible Erie County older adult residents through a prepaid debit card. Customers will have the ability to use the ConnectorCard to pay for transportation-related expenses which include but are not limited to taxi services, rideshare services, public transportation and private transportation services.

GOAL 3: OLDER ADULTS WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN FINANCIAL SECURITY THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

Possible Initiatives to achieve this goal:

3.1 Create a Senior Homeshare matching program where older adults can share a home to split expenses and provide companionship

After loved ones pass away and/or children relocate out of the area, older adults often live alone. Most do not want to leave the home he or she has lived most of his or her life. Due to lack of resources, however, the home is not maintained and falls into disrepair. Investments in the home to make it more livable for the older adult are not made and the home is not adapted to reflect his or her physical limitations. In addition to the issues regarding home expenses, older adults experience significant

isolation and can go days without talking to another individual.

Erie County will develop a Senior HomeShare program that will bring together an older adult homeowner who has room to spare and a person who is looking for a place to live. The provider and the seeker each have a private bedroom, but both have full use of the rest of the home. The Department of Senior Services will facilitate a match from both the home owner and home seeker based on needs, preferences and lifestyles of both parties, and will conduct a thorough background check on each to help ensure the safety of both individuals. Individuals with a pending criminal charge, history of abuse or a substance or alcohol use disorder will not be allowed to participate.



3.2 Expand the Representative Payee program to provide benefit payment management for beneficiaries who are incapable of managing their Social Security payments



Many older adults have a challenge paying their bills, even if he or she has the funds to pay the expenses. This happens frequently when a spouse has passed away who did that chore on behalf of his or her family. The remaining spouse then has difficulty learning this new essential chore after not doing it his or her entire life. Traditional networks of support may not be available to assist. As a result, he

or she falls behind on his or her bills, racking up late expenses.

The County will create a service where it will act as a representative payee on behalf of the older adult. A representative payee is an entity for someone who cannot manage or direct someone else to manage his or her money. The main responsibilities of a payee are to use the benefits to pay for the current and foreseeable needs of the beneficiary and properly save any benefits not needed to meet current needs. A payee must also keep records of expenses.

While Erie County Department of Social Services currently performs this function for many adults in the adult protective services system, this service will be marketed as a benefit to many older adults not at risk for additional maltreatment. Erie County will work with its system of senior organizations, such as senior centers and meals-on-wheels, to increase identification of older adults in need of a service and educating him or her of it. Erie County will work with a third party vendor to directly provide the service, pay the fixed costs of this service, and negotiate a fair amount for older adults to access this service.

NEXT STEPS

As already stated, the initiatives discussed here represent the collective ideas of Erie County personnel and community stakeholders. They gathered together in early 2019 to brainstorm strategies that would help our community move closer to the goals identified for each of the three populations. The Live Well Erie Task Force and Workgroups will monitor progress towards the goals by annually reporting any positive or negative change in the data indicators assigned to each goal. The Task Force understands that no one strategy will make a difference; but rather that only through the implementation of many strategies, over the course of many years, combined with the efforts already underway by many community organizations, will progress towards the goals become evident. In the event that after several years the indicators are not moving in a positive direction, the Task Force and Workgroups will reevaluate the initiatives and, if necessary, will develop different community strategies more likely to move the indicators in the right direction.

Thank you again for your interest in Live Well Erie and its vision to ensure that no one is left behind in the new Erie County and that everyone has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential. We hope you will join the effort by becoming an official Live Well Erie Partner. It is only by working together, towards one common vision, that the goals and ideals expressed here, truly become a reality.