

# TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Live Well Springfield, Springfield, Mass.

*Funded by Trinity Health, the four-year Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI) supported eight communities to build capacity for — and successfully implement — policy, system, and environmental (PSE) change strategies. Each collaboration — involving a lead community organization with a full-time TCI-funded program director, the local Trinity Health hospital, and other partners — received grant funding and technical assistance and participated in peer learning opportunities. This site profile, prepared by the cross-site evaluation team at the Georgia Health Policy Center in partnership with the local partners, outlines the work and impact supported by TCI between 2016 and 2020.*

## The Partnership

The Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI) in Springfield, Mass., was built on 10 years of success by the multisector Live Well Springfield (LWS) coalition. LWS brings together over 25 organizations working together to build and sustain a culture of health in Springfield that includes the broadest definition of health, including healthy eating, active living, the built environment, economic opportunity, housing, and education. TCI strategically connected several LWS coalition member organizations to work together to reduce child and youth obesity and smoking rates in Springfield neighborhoods with large health inequities among communities of color.

The TCI partners coordinated their efforts to create policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change in the areas of (1) access to healthy foods and physical activity in the school environment, (2) access to healthy foods and physical activity in the pre-K environment, (3) reduction in youth access to tobacco products, and (4) improving infrastructure to support safe walking and biking through the continued implementation of the Complete Streets policy. Underpinning their work is an intentional focus on engaging residents and building their advocacy skills and opportunities — including establishing a Resident Advisory Council.

### Live Well Springfield TCI Partners

- Mercy Medical Center
- Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
- Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Springfield Food Policy Council
- Square One
- Way Finders
- Springfield Public Schools

## Approach




The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts (PHIWM) convenes the LWS coalition. Initially, TCI was overseen by a program director based in Mercy Medical Center to provide project and fiscal management. At the end of Year 3 of the grant, in June 2019, the LWS manager at PHIWM took over as the program director. Through subawards, the coalition funded individual partners to conduct work on food access, Complete Streets, school wellness, early childhood wellness, and community engagement. The LWS initiative focused on eight of Springfield's 17 neighborhoods and six schools that serve those neighborhoods; each neighborhood was selected based on the level of poverty and the ethnic and racial distribution represented by residents. Much of the TCI policy work centered on changes that reached beyond the target neighborhoods to the school district, city, and state level. The LWS coalition as a whole and the TCI partners focused on building resident capacity to be involved in and to lead efforts for policy, system, and environmental changes in schools and the community.

- LWS allocated around **32%** of their budget to program director salary and backbone functions including the resident advisory project.
- LWS issued around **24%** of funds as subawards to partners.
- LWS leveraged around **\$1.6 million** in match funding derived from **95%** cash and **5%** in-kind contributions from hospitals, philanthropy, nonprofits, and the public school system.

# Areas of Impact

TCI in Springfield focused on the pre-K and school environments, the built environment, tobacco control, and coalition development with a strong focus on community engagement.

DOMAIN	YEARS	PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TCI-SUPPORTED WORK
 Early Care and Education	1-4	Square One adopted a pre-K wellness policy that improved the nutrition standards and food quality and placed a focus on local purchasing. The policies reach 218 students at three childcare centers. Pre-K classes are using a new nutrition curriculum and an evidence-based physical activity curriculum.
 School District Wellness Policy	1-4	LWS partners, parents, and caregivers advocated to amend School District Wellness Policy and procurement policies. The district adopted an updated wellness policy that strengthened nutrition standards for the district and included Safe Routes to School curriculum for elementary students. This policy reaches 26,000 students at 59 schools.
 Schools: Purchasing	1-4	SPS and SFPC worked with the district food provider, Sodexo, and regional food experts to increase local food purchasing. By the end of the project, Sodexo sourced 16% of school food locally.
 Schools: Gardens	1-4	SPS expanded the number of school gardens from 16 to 29 and adopted a new school garden curriculum.
 Schools: Physical Activity	1-4	SPS worked to increase physical activity among students through expansion of before- and after-school programming, efforts to expand recess, and piloting an evidence-based curriculum.
 Safe Routes to School	1-4	Way Finders and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) worked with students and residents to conduct walk audits, develop walking maps, and advocate for change around schools. The city implemented walk audit recommendations near 5 out of 6 target schools, and two schools developed walking and biking clubs. As noted above, the districted include Safe Routes to School curriculum in the updated wellness policy.

DOMAIN	YEARS	PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TCI-SUPPORTED WORK
 Built Environment	1–4	PVPC along with other TCI partners and residents advocated for Complete Streets policy implementation in target neighborhoods and helped the city secure more than \$800,000 to implement Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School improvements.
 Tobacco	1–4	Community and youth peer health advocates from MLKFS successfully campaigned for city and state-level Tobacco 21. The state passed the law in July 2018.
 Coalition Development	2–4	Live Well Springfield developed a Resident Advisory Council and Resident Engagement Guide. Eight community members currently sit on the advisory council.



## Early Care and Education

Over the course of TCI, Square One — a nonprofit early education and care facility that operates childcare centers and offers a range of family support services — has led efforts to reduce childhood obesity by creating environments and systems in the pre-K setting that increase opportunities for healthy, affordable, and culturally desirable food and daily physical activity. Square One focused on creating sustainable PSE change within their organization and promoting and advocating for similar change among other early education and care providers in Springfield. This work reached 218 students at their own centers, who represent 20% of the pre-K population in Springfield:

*“I think we are transforming the way that a 3- and 4-year-old thinks about food, and when they go home and speak to their parents and caregiver about food, we are instilling change at home as well.”*

- Square One established internal systems to support healthy eating and physical activity by adopting and implementing an updated wellness policy and designating a staff position to coordinate health and wellness.
- Through the newly established Young Children’s Advisory Council for the City of Springfield, Square One is developing leadership and advocacy skills to empower the parents of young children.
- Square One improved nutrition and physical activity at the centers by adding fresh fruits and vegetables to the menu through a farm-to-preschool program and school gardens, and implementing a healthy eating curriculum and an evidence-based physical activity curriculum. Based on their observations and surveying, Square One has reported that children, parents/caregivers, and staff have increased knowledge and awareness of the benefits of healthy food — specifically fresh fruits and vegetables.



## Public School Wellness

Springfield Public Schools enacted a number of changes to improve the nutrition and physical activity of students including wellness policy updates, procurement policies, a partnership with the culinary nutrition center to improve food quality and menus, a school garden program, an evidence-based physical activity program, and an expansion of Safe Routes to School programming. Outreach efforts by parent and community advocates catalyzed much of this change.

TCI technical assistance provider Change Lab Solutions assessed the wellness policy before and after the amendments. Change Lab reported that updates significantly strengthened the school wellness policy, which will translate into better health outcomes for students in the district.

### Policy Changes

- The Springfield Public Schools (SPS) district director of wellness was an internal champion who was responsible for changing the language in the wellness policy and, along with the school nurse leader, presented the policy to the SPS School Committee. The Springfield Food Policy Council (SFPC) and community advocates led by Way Finders successfully advocated for the SPS School Committee to amend the district wellness policy to include key nutrition guidelines, designate a school wellness contact person, and include Safe Routes to School. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, SPS began efforts to educate school staff and families about the newly revised wellness policy and support its implementation.
- In a November 2019 survey of School Committee members, half of respondents (three of six) said they had been contacted by community members about improving school food. Most School Committee members reported that advocacy from community members made them more aware of the concerns of constituents.
- Complementary to wellness policy efforts, the SFPC and parent advocates engaged in statewide advocacy in support of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) and Breakfast in the Classroom after the bell. Advocacy to expand Breakfast in the Classroom led to local changes in the breakfast and lunch menus, as well as the introduction of a Breakfast in the Classroom bill at the state level.
- SPS also coordinated with the new Culinary Nutrition Center to improve the types of food offered at schools and to increase student engagement and student feedback on the foods served.

- The Culinary Nutrition Center was cooperatively planned and financed by the city, school department, Sodexo, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Advocates from SFPC were instrumental in this 10-year initiative. It began operations spring 2019.
- While the CNC was not funded with the TCI grant, its alignment with school nutrition policy and environmental changes helped spur change in the school menu, and it will prepare free school meals for **30,000** students daily.

### Procurement

- SPS and SFPC worked with Sodexo to contract with local farms and increase their use of local food. As of May 2020, SPS and Sodexo developed partnerships to source locally and regionally grown produce from 12 local farms, two regional produce distributors, two local fisheries, two New England dairy processors, and three local bakeries. In 2019-2020, the district spent 16% of their food budget locally. Regionally purchased products included produce, dairy, fish, and bakery products.

## School Gardens

- During TCI, the district expanded their school garden from 16 gardens to 29 gardens, and preparations are underway for five additional gardens. The school garden partners also worked to grow more culturally relevant foods in the gardens and increase diversity among the school garden teachers.

## Physical Activity

- In Year 2, TCI assessed current practices and needs for physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school at all Springfield schools to prioritize strategies to strengthen physical activity policy and practice.
- SPS piloted SPARK, an enhanced, evidence-based, physical activity curriculum, in five high schools. As part of SPARK implementation, the district trained 24 teachers in the curriculum.
- Over TCI, 11 schools began offering BOKS, an evidence-based before- and after-school physical activity program. In the last year, approximately 350 students registered and 250 participated daily. SPS worked to maintain a relationship with Springfield College to create a pipeline for program instructors.
- During Year 4, SPS also began exploring expanding recess, which is supported by its inclusion in the wellness policy. Efforts to improve recess are expected to continue next school year.

## Safe Routes to School

- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission worked with local middle school students to conduct walk audits. The students produced a report and wrote advocacy letters to the mayor. Way Finders advocates also conducted walk audits and used the findings to advocate for lighting and infrastructure improvements.
- Way Finders worked closely with two target schools to support safe routes. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) SRTS program they conduct surveys and walking audits, and develop walking maps. To support implementation, Way Finders conducted Walk & Roll to School days, walking clubs, and a walking school bus pilot; 135 students participated in these events.
- The Department of Public Works implemented walk audit recommendations around five out of six priority schools, using MassDOT or other city transportation funds.
- By 2020, 29 schools were considered MassDOT Safe Routes to Schools partners, including all four TCI target elementary schools.

*“In addition to improving safety for children walking/biking to school, the successful implementation of walk audit recommendations is empowering and reinforcing to the participants (e.g., principals, volunteers, teachers, advocates, city staff, etc.) because it demonstrates the system is working.”*



## Built Environment

During TCI, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) supported the implementation of a 2016 Complete Streets policy and worked to convene partners to improve the built environment in Springfield. In Year 2 of the grant, when partners became more intentional about cross-collaboration, Way Finders' (WF) resident health advocates (RHAs) and Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services' (MLKFS) peer health advocates (PHAs) became engaged in Complete Streets work, and their engagement has continued to deepen and move work forward throughout the grant:

Way Finders provides regional housing and support services to address homelessness. MLKFS is a multiservice agency developing skills and opportunities for families in the broader Springfield community. Through TCI cross-collaboration, resident advocates from both organizations became involved with Complete Streets advocacy.

- PVPC convened monthly Built Environment Committee meetings that brought together city staff and other organizations, and participated in a monthly resident WalkBike advocacy group.
- Resident advocates took ownership of built environment and initiated projects to improve lighting and sidewalks. Resident involvement and advocacy shifted the dynamic between residents and elected officials, and increased the accountability of decision-makers. City officials are now reaching out to residents to identify key issues and cite advocates as a reason for continuing to work on Complete Streets funds and improvements. In Year 4, there were five stipended resident health advocates and 22 community advocates working with Way Finders.
- Over the course of the grant, PVPC supported numerous proposals, helping the city secure more than \$800,000 to implement Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School improvements. Additionally, PVPC collaborated with the city to bring the ValleyBike bike share to Springfield, and they convinced the city to allocate \$400,000 funding for a pedestrian wayfinding system.

*"TCI brought Black and other people of color to the Complete Streets conversation. This is transformative."*



## Tobacco

Over the course of the grant, MLKFS worked with community and youth peer health advocates to advocate for local and state Tobacco 21 policies as well as other complimentary tobacco control measures:

*"The most important thing for me was getting the vape flavors banned because so many kids were using them and then dying. Changing that was a really big thing."*

- In Year 2, coalition members and youth peer health advocates presented on Tobacco 21 policy at local and state hearings, met with local and state officials, and worked to educate fellow residents. The Springfield Tobacco 21 policy passed in January 2018. Massachusetts passed statewide Tobacco 21 in July 2018. These policies impact 949,965 youth aged 15-24 statewide.
- After Tobacco 21 passage, TCI and peer health advocates worked to support Tobacco 21 implementation and other tobacco control measures including flavor restrictions and limiting tobacco permits.
- Over the course of TCI, 30 peer health advocates participated in outreach activities, trainings, and leadership development. In program surveys, advocates reported increased abilities to communicate, leadership skills, and exposure to medical and public health job opportunities.



## Coalition Development

Throughout the project, LWS continued to strengthen their TCI team within the larger coalition and worked to create a structure to support resident leadership in the coalition. TCI technical assistance provider Community Catalyst hosted a training with the broader LWS coalition on best practices and processes for engaging community residents, and assisted the TCI partners in developing engagement materials including a Resident Engagement Guide. The partners also used the Community Catalyst Engaging for Equity Framework to identify key stakeholders for outreach in engagement:

- As part of their effort to build community leadership in the coalition, PHIWM hired a new LWS coalition manager who had previously been the chief operating officer at a key partner organization, and Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services hired a full-time staff coordinator of public health initiatives, who had been an intern with the coalition.
- The TCI partners identified and engaged new key stakeholders through the Engaging for Equity process. Newly engaged stakeholders (including school district management staff and city council members) contributed to accomplishments such as the adoption of the Springfield Public School Wellness Policy.
- LWS created a Resident Advisory Council and developed goals, an operating structure, and a Resident Engagement Guide for this group — informed by current resident advocates. The Resident Advisory Council is designed to strengthen community buy-in and engage individuals who are most impacted by the work of the coalition. In Year 4, LWS finalized the infrastructure of the Resident Advisory Committee, including the stipend process, and recruited eight residents. To further encourage resident engagement and highlight the Resident Advisory Council, LWS featured six resident advocates in a role model media campaign.
- The coalition's TCI team dedicated time during each meeting to sharing resources and upcoming events and activities, intentionally seeking team members to participate across initiatives. This helped increase understanding of overall goals and build the collective coalition vision.

*"Having the resident involvement really changed the conversation with some of the leaders and community leaders like city council and school council and others. ... [T]hat's a long-lasting change, and both on a personal level for those people, and at a community level."*

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most significant hurdle the coalition had to overcome. The pandemic put an immediate stop to having another year of project implementation and advocacy. Some partners immediately stopped work that required community interactions and engagement to respond to the immediate needs of residents. The pandemic showed the coalition's ability to pivot in a time of crisis and connect with the community to provide services that address urgent needs like food insecurity, access to prevention information, and social supports to stay safe while under a stay-at-home order. Although schools were closed, SPS put significant effort into the provision (and promotion) of meals to students at emergency meal sites throughout the city. By June they served over 1 million meals and partnered with Springfield Food Policy Council and other nonprofits to provide fresh fruits and vegetables, masks, toiletries, and other resources for families at the meal sites. Other TCI partners pivoted from work on built environment and tobacco and joined with partners to assist in connecting residents to key services and promoting the availability of services. LWS was able to raise an additional \$689,775 in cash match contributions to further support the community response to the global pandemic.

## Key Insights from TCI

TCI Springfield built on years of previous work and success as a coalition and as individual organizations. During TCI, the partners focused on creating intentional cross-collaboration between partners and on building resident capacity to lead community advocacy. This strong focus on community engagement and advocacy served as a catalyst and provided the momentum for the coalition's work and success:

- Intentional cross-collaboration between partners allowed the group to support each other and use collective thinking to address barriers. Monthly TCI leadership team meetings were spaces where the partners could share program updates and ask for support. These meetings helped build a shared understanding of each organizations' work and priorities and allowed partners to intentionally build collaboration into their strategic workplans.
- Resident engagement was a critical catalyst for the initiative. Resident voices and advocacy played a key role in the success of Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets, healthy school foods, and tobacco control. The engagement of residents by community partners built the momentum and started a blueprint for how LWS could establish the Resident Advisory Council. The Resident Advisory Council better connects the coalition to the community and increases ownership and buy-in. This strengthens the coalition's competitiveness for future funding opportunities.
- Building from pre-existing efforts and having the right partners at the table gave the TCI projects momentum to succeed. TCI Springfield partners had a longstanding and consistent history of efforts in their respective fields. Having the right community partners helped to build strong relationships with both residents and decision-makers and built the strong advocacy effort that was crucial to the coalition's success.

## Looking Ahead

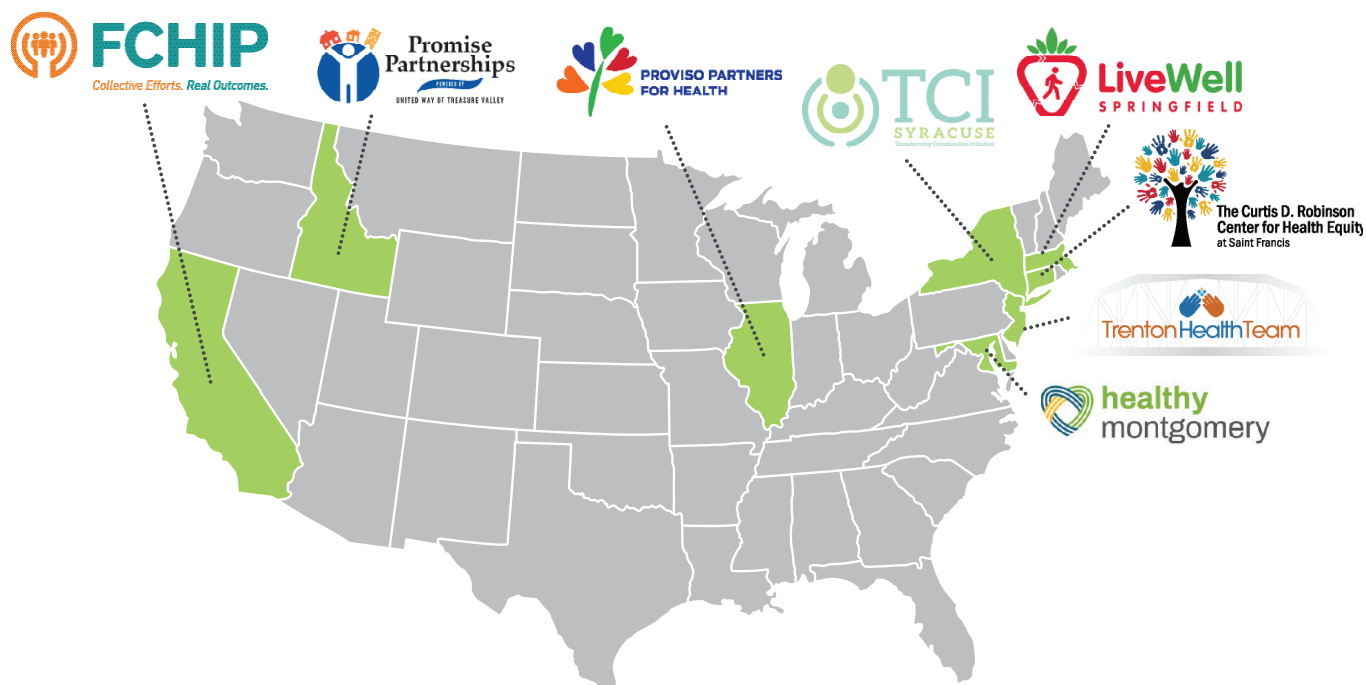
Much of the work for the next few years will undoubtedly address the inequities highlighted by COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, the efforts to address food insecurity during the pandemic will undoubtedly raise up some new policy, systems, and environmental issues that LWS, based on the strength of its policy advocacy experience and partnerships, will work to address in the future. The PSE change framework will continue to be integrated in all of the LWS initiatives.

Under TCI, LWS learned the importance of interconnecting grant projects within the coalition. Age-friendly advocacy efforts complement TCI food justice work; they now work on Complete Streets improvements from climate justice, physical activity, and mobility lenses, as well as a racial justice lens. As a coalition they are moving away from silos to integrative solutions of connected problems through different funding resources.

The coalition has secured several new grants that will leverage TCI accomplishments and expand in Complete Streets, food access, climate change, and other work to address social determinants of health past the end of the TCI grant. Coalition partners believe several grant awards would not have been possible without the relationships built and progress made under TCI. With the development of the Resident Advisory Council, LWS will have a direct resident voice and strong, prepared advocates ready to identify concerns, propose solutions, and advocate for change.



# About the Transforming Communities Initiative



Trinity Health launched the Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI) in 2016 to provide grant funding and technical assistance to hospital-community partnerships. Between July 2016 and June 2020, these partnerships worked on a range of initiatives including tobacco prevention and reduction, public school wellness, early care centers' policies and practices, community food access and nutrition, built environment policies and infrastructure to improve walkability and safety (Complete Streets), breastfeeding policies, and economic development. Partnerships also built community capacity and strengthened local coalitions.

TCI technical assistance was provided by [ChangeLab Solutions](#), [Community Catalyst](#), [Public Good Projects](#), [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids](#), and the [Georgia Health Policy Center \(GHPC\)](#).

GHPC — in close collaboration with local evaluators — conducted the TCI cross-site evaluation to assess partnership development and collaboration, as well as policy, systems, and environmental change reach, implementation, and impact. Data sources included key stakeholder interviews, TCI partner collaboration surveys, and project documents including site annual reports, meeting notes, site visits, and observations. Quotations in this profile are from stakeholder interviews and partner surveys.