WATERBURY TCI SUMMARY

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.

The Partnership

Trinity Health Of New England/St. Mary’s Hospital, through its presence and work in the Waterbury community, had a relationship with many organizations. Trinity Health Of New England approached Waterbury’s Bridge to Success (BTS) to serve as the lead CBO since all their work is grounded in equity.

BTS was established in 2010 as the state’s first cradle to career youth initiative and is a member of the nationally acclaimed Strive Together Cradle to Career Network. In the last five years, Strive Together and BTS have committed to, and increased focus on, dismantling the policies, practices and beliefs that have historically disenfranchised marginalized community members, with the intent to co-create sustainable equitable systems that support BIPOC youth, families, and communities. All of BTS initiatives focus on education, resident engagement, advocacy and systems change. BTS’ building blocks are to:

1. Build capacity by providing direct support and connecting partners, trainers, and experts that provide technical assistance and access to broader networks to promote continuous improvement.
2. Transform power by recognizing the community's ability to actualize change and understand that systems transformation is only possible when communities, particularly Black and Latine are equipped with the tools and mindsets they need to be full participants in public life and, thus, have more control over their destinies; and
3. Sustain community by curating joyful and decolonized co-learning spaces that invite stakeholders to rebuild and sustain networks that work.

TCI Partners

- Saint Mary’s Hospital
- Hispanic Coalition of Greater Waterbury
- RIBA/Aspira

Approach

Waterbury’s Bridge To Success (BTS) utilizes a system to adequately access collective impact through a grassroot, data driven approach to convene over 90+ partners into Collaborative Action Networks (CANs). The CAN’s focus is on improving outcomes and indicators, leveraging existing resources and striving to engage, empower and inform the Waterbury community. Instead of creating a new multi-sector collaborative for TCI, BTS created a TCI CAN so that the work could be aligned with and leverage the efforts of the existing Let Youth Lead CAN,
which is focused on youth mental health and the Family Engagement CAN. BTS hired a TCI Project Coordinator to coordinate the TCI efforts.

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<th>Domain</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Progress and Outcomes</th>
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<td>Planning</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>The TCI Core Team was established. Mental health was identified as the primary area of focus with poverty, lack of work, and racism being the core contributors to increased anxiety and depression among Waterbury residents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition Development</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>The TCI CAN was launched in October 2023. Fifteen (15) individuals were recruited based on “how they showed up” in the community, their lived experience, content expertise and policy influence. Ninety-nine percent of the TCI CAN members are Black and/or Latine and all are residents of Waterbury. The initial five meetings focused on building the capacity and knowledge of the members so they could own the TCI.</td>
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**Planning**

In January 2023, focus groups and community conversations were held within neighborhoods with large percentages of BIPOC residents in English and Spanish around the five health priorities identified in the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment published by the Greater Waterbury Health Partnership. Mental health was identified as the primary area of focus.

In the Spring of 2023, the TCI core Team comprised of BTS staff, The Trinity Health Of New England’s Community Health and Well Being Manager and the local Evaluator, decided to conduct a community driven root cause analysis (RCA) to narrow the focus. A series of community conversations were held with residents, a meeting of mental providers and a summer survey campaign of 295 adults and 848 youth was conducted using mental health data from the CHNA and the problem statement “Why do you think Waterbury residents are experiencing a rise with anxiety and depression”?

Waterbury Bridge to Success (BTS) Let Youth Lead (LYL) Youth Advisory Think Tank is dedicated to empowering young minds in Waterbury by prioritizing mental health and breaking down barriers. LYL is a movement aimed at amplifying youth voices and driving real change in the Waterbury schools and the city.

As a result of this community-driven RCA process, the root causes for increased anxiety and depression were determined to be poverty, lack of work, and racism.

**Coalition Development**

BTS identified individuals who they knew to be community connectors based on “how they showed up” in the community, their lived experience, content expertise and policy influence. Their content expertise includes mental health, education, parent leadership, workforce development, behavioral health, criminal justice, community health and engagement. Ninety-nine percent of the TCI CAN members are Black and/or Latine and all...
are residents of Waterbury. Members were asked to make a 3-year commitment and are receiving a $1,500/year stipend for their participation.

To date, the TCI CAN has met five (5) times. These early meetings were designed to ground the CAN members in the TCI initiative, establish group norms, define roles and responsibilities and begin to build their capacity to take a data-driven approach to the work. Through a facilitated process the group reviewed and discussed the following:

- Data: the summer survey data, the Waterbury Community Index, the CHNA and the Waterbury 2023 Equity Report.
- Types of racism.
- Policy, System and Environment (PSE) strategies.
- Backwards mapping.
- The spectrum of community engagement to ownership and.
- Current policies related to the cost of living in Waterbury.

CAN members were also provided an opportunity to participate in several training opportunities offered by CT statewide organizations:

a. **Groundwater Approach.** The Groundwater metaphor teaches us that our society is shaped by race in ways that can be unfair. It shows us that racial unfairness exists in many places, no matter how rich or poor someone is, and it’s caused by how our systems work, not just by how people act or where they come from. Understanding this helps leaders see that our society is built on a history of racial differences. It’s like having a problem with the water underground, and we need solutions that go deep to fix it. By starting here, we can make big changes for the better.

b. **Health Equity Solutions Healthcare Equity Policy Academy.** Health Equity Solutions initiates and catalyzes policy programs and practices that advance and sustain health equity in Connecticut. Participants of the Academy will walk away with a greater understanding of factors that can impact on one’s overall health and well-being. This training will provide participants with the tools to understand better what health equity is, how it is reflected in Connecticut, and how they can support the movement towards a better system of health for all.

The March 2024 meeting was a pivotal turning point for the TCI CAN. The CAN members were asked to narrow the contributors of anxiety and depression (lack of work, poverty and racism). The lack of affordable housing was presented as a cross-cutting issue by the core team based on previous CAN meeting discussions. The full CAN rejected the idea of narrowing their work to one issue and expressed their interest in creating 3-4 working groups to address each of the contributors including housing. They asked the core team to develop a survey in advance of the April meeting to assess members’ interest in topical work groups. This strategy has the potential for significant communitywide impact as it will allow the CAN as a group to advocate for policy change strategies across a number of interconnected issues and empower them to advocate for system changes within their respective organizations. It is anticipated that during the month of April, the TCI CAN will articulate the outcomes and PSE strategies the group wants to coalesce around so that a logic model and community action plan can be developed.

The TCI core team has consistently embraced the TCI design framework that this work moves “at the speed of trust” and will continue to support the TCI CAN to assume leadership and drive the work at their own pace.
TCI CAN wants to step back in order to move forward and wants to spend more time getting to know each other, understanding each person’s story and expertise and recommitting to the group norms and collaborative infrastructure.

**Key Insights from TCI:**

TCI Waterbury is built on years of previous work and success by BTS and a cadre of diverse individual organizations throughout Waterbury prioritizing the lived experience of its BIPOC community. The result of the Mayor’s Diversity Committee, co-chaired by Althea Brooks, BTS Executive Director and Pastor Kristopher Reese, Grace Baptist Church and BTS Community Council, in partnership with Health Equity Council presented a recommendation to the Mayor for the City to declare racism a public health crisis. The right people are at the table and are engaged. CAN members are vocal, inquisitive about data and are hungry to take action that will change the system and improve outcomes for the Black and Latine residents of Waterbury. The strong focus on community engagement and advocacy is serving as a catalyst for the TCI CAN’s work and future success.

Authentic engagement of community residents takes time and investment. The TCI CAN members have consistently acknowledged that the systems and institutions in Waterbury are primarily white with a lot of power and privilege, and that the needs of residents who are primarily people of color are not being considered or addressed by the current structures. The Can members see the TCI as an incredible opportunity to disrupt the system and transform their community. Technical assistance — like that provided by the Illinois Public Health Institute has been very helpful.

Working at the “speed of trust” is a process and cannot be short circuited or rushed if we truly believe that residents most impacted by the problem and inequities need to be engaged and lead the work.

The selection of BTS as the lead CBO ensures a racial equity focus for the TCI work. BTS has a wealth of experience using processes and tools that are results and data driven and building collaborations that are inclusive and utilize PSE strategies. The collective impact approach aligns with the intention and objective of the TCI initiative. The Five Pillars of Collective Impact are critical in driving a community led initiative:

- **Shared Agenda** – efforts made from January through August 2023 were to engage the community around a common health priority for the City.
- **Data Driven** – the review, discussion and feedback on various sources of data that inform the intention of the work is critical. This included the local CHNA, ALICE Projections and national, regional and local outcomes.
- **Constant Communication** – ensuring there is ongoing engagement, updates and feedback surveys on the process and implementation of the project are critical for developing a community action plan.
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities** – ensuring the work of the CAN are in alignment with the intention of the CBO partners and members of the CAN to ensure metrics are similar in scope.
- **Backbone Support** – BTS serves as the backbone support to the CAN through facilitation, administrative support, training opportunities and resource gathering.
Moreover, the active participation of Trinity Health Of New England and their experience with health equity efforts has been invaluable. Increasing the capacity of the CAN members has been a priority to ensure there is equity in power and skill is pertinent. In partnership with Health Equity Solutions (HES), ⅔ of the TCI CAN members participated in the HES’s Healthcare Equity Policy Academy. This Academy had 5 sessions focused on critical issues. The course content included Advocacy 101 and 102, Story Telling for Advocacy, Health Equity/JEDI 101 Conducting Assessments. This focused training was for Waterbury residents passionate about addressing the disparities in healthcare.

Establishing a meeting cadence for the core team and a collective understanding of the role and purpose of the core team as a problem-solving and planning opportunity in support of the lead CBO was pertinent in establishing the long term commitment for the work.

Looking Ahead

The work going forward will continue to be led by the members of the TCI CAN. Their efforts will first and foremost be focused on bringing Black and Brown people together in solidarity around a common agenda. The CAN members are and will continue to be advocates to change the power dynamics in Waterbury and reimagine a more equitable system that is responsive to the mental health needs of the BIPOC community in Waterbury. The CAN members are committed to sustaining their collective action and building accountability into the results and outcomes.

Since mental health was identified as an area of focus by both adults and youth and adult mental health affects youth and the entire family, the TCI CAN will explicitly develop an integrated approach to bring youth and adult voices into the problem-solving process and the development of the Community Action Plan (CAP).

The TCI CAN will begin to meet more frequently, organize into workgroups and develop community action plans for each of the root causes to increased anxiety and depression: lack of work, poverty, racism and housing. Once the TCI CAN decides which (or all) of the root causes they will work on by June 2024, key community stakeholders will be engaged as partners in the strategy development and implementation process.