

UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS of Northeastern Pennsylvania



2021
ANNUAL REPORT

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Our Mission

To work together with neighbors to provide services and create opportunities that empower individuals and build strong, interdependent communities.

Leadership Message



DEAR FRIENDS,

During the past year, we continued to face obstacles and tests of our resilience. As a community, we continued to fight our way out of this pandemic while attempting to rebuild our economy and care for our most vulnerable community members. I'm pleased with the role United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) has played in contributing to these efforts.

Our team worked closely with city administrators to distribute nearly \$1M to Scranton residents impacted by COVID 19. These funds, made available through the Cares Act, were used to support rent and utility payments to prevent eviction or shut offs for hundreds of individuals and families.

With support from our local foundations, we began delivering workforce development programs to assist individuals embarking on new career paths with family-supporting wages. Please read through the report to learn more about our Upward Mobility, Careers in Care and NEPA Readiness in Skilled Employment (RISE) programs and the anticipated impact of these services.

In April, we developed a new partnership with Community Cares Behavioral Health to provide housing and other services to support the social determinants of health for medical assistance recipients in Lackawanna County. Within nine months the UNC team developed and executed care plans for more than 3,000 individuals!

In each of our programmatic departments, 2021 gave us the chance to rely heavily on our strengths and our 98 years of experience providing services and creating opportunities to empower individual and build strong, interdependent communities.

During these uncertain times, with so much change around and ahead of us, we take great comfort in the consistent, generous support of the individuals, groups, corporations, businesses, and foundations that stand behind us and make it possible for us to fulfill our mission.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Broderick
Board Chairperson





United Neighborhood Community Development Corporation



DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

The 15th anniversary of United Neighborhood Community Development Corporation (UNCDC) coincided with the ongoing challenges caused by COVID-19. These challenges tested our resiliency but not our commitment to serving our community. Despite rising construction costs, reduced manpower and strained resources, we've persevered. Our community still struggles to meet the needs of residents seeking safe, affordable housing, therefore UNCDC continues to rise to the challenge. Much of our time in 2021 was spent maintaining our existing properties and planning for expansion!

The year began with the completion of the Fallbrook family housing community in Carbondale. In January 2021, the final tenants moved into the 36 apartments of the Fallbrook development where the campus offers many amenities for the residents, including a spacious community room, laundry facilities, a walking path, and on-site exercise equipment. United Neighborhood Centers staff also offers organized programs for seniors, families, and children that are on-site. Many of these programs and services are also available to the greater Carbondale community.

UNCDC completed an additional project during 2021 which addressed two ongoing issues: blight and affordable housing. A condemned single-family house in North Scranton was brought back up to its original splendor during this complete rehab. This project was a first for the UNCDC team, where most of the construction work was completed by our talented Facilities and Maintenance Staff. During the summer of 2021, a family moved into the house after they had been facing a lengthy period of housing instability.

As 2021 ends, we are adjusting to the certainty of more COVID related challenges in 2022, however, we are looking forward to the opportunities that UNCDC will make available to the residents of Northeastern Pennsylvania. We are planning to develop more affordable housing options throughout a wider geographic area in NEPA.

*Thanks to all our generous donors and supporters.
We are extremely grateful for your continued support
that makes this great work possible.*

Sincerely,
Maureen Brennan, UNCDC Board Chair

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Brick Avenue Construction Complete

United Neighborhood Community Development Corporation (UNCDC) completed renovations on a newly acquired 8-bedroom single family house on Brick Avenue in North Scranton this year. This project gave us a chance to test our skills as most of the work was completed by the Facilities Department of United Neighborhood Centers. The Facilities crew put in new windows, refinished flooring, painted all of the rooms, and installed a new kitchen and new bathrooms.

This project allowed UNCDC an opportunity to work closely with two valuable partners – the Women's Resource Center and the City of Scranton's Office of Economic and Community Development. The end result was a beautiful addition to the neighborhood which brought a condemned property back up to code in a peaceful, family neighborhood. The property will be well maintained and serve the needs of a large, extended family for many years to come.



Stowe Apartments

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Apartments was the first affordable housing community to be completed by United Neighborhood Community Development Corporation (UNCDC) when it was first established in 2006. This eighteen-unit family housing development has been home to families and individuals for more than a decade; in fact, seven of the apartments have been occupied by the same tenants since the building opened in 2009.

Despite the continued beauty of this rehabbed former elementary school, we've had to start replacing some of the building systems including HVAC units, water heaters, and the roof that covers the building. The replacement of the roof became urgent when heavy rains caused a leak in the attic space. The funding was made possible through a \$100,000 grant via the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) through a program called PHARE.

With a new roof, the Stowe Apartments will be able to continue housing families at the South Scranton location for many years to come. It's a great example of how UNCDC's partnership with PHFA helps to preserve affordable housing into the future.

RISE

Readiness in Skilled Employment



In addition to the technical classes at Johnson College, UNC provides comprehensive supportive services throughout the course of the program to prepare individuals to enter or advance in the workforce. Career coaches work with each participant and create individualized goals and an action plan. These action plans outline responsibilities of both the participant and the career coach and set follow-up meetings and deadlines for each action step. Participants are exposed to potential employers from the start of the program and career coaches will help get them placed with employers.

The success of the RISE program will directly impact workforce strategies across the state of Pennsylvania. Locally, the effect on Lackawanna and Luzerne counties is recognized by an increase in the available skilled workers for the trade industry, as well as a reduction of the stress currently placed on government and social service agencies that assist low-income and homeless individuals. Increased economic prosperity benefits the community as a whole.

“For over 100 years, Johnson College has worked to produce skilled technicians needed for the workforce, and now the need is greater than ever,” said Dr Katie Leonard, Johnson College CEO & President. “By our organizations working together, more people from our community will have an opportunity to lessen the job market’s skills gap by becoming well-trained technicians without having to overcome certain barriers. Plus, they will enter the workforce with the knowledge and training to be able to earn family-sustaining wages.”

Upward Economic Mobility

United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) and Johnson College partnered together to develop the Upward Economic Mobility program. Funded by The Weinberg Foundation, Upward Economic Mobility is a program that provides soft-skills education and career coaching to those interested in the healthcare field and trades such as welding and plumbing. Through this program, participants work with their coach to identify and reduce any barriers to continued education. Coaching sessions vary in intensity and are based on need. While GED/HSE is required to enroll in technical classes, Coaches can guide individuals who have not yet hit this milestone. Technical certifications include clinical medical assistant, basic maintenance, machinist, welding, plumbing, and forklift operator.

Thousands of residents in northeastern Pennsylvania are currently unemployed or under-employed and struggling to meet their basic needs, yet local employers report open positions that they cannot fill because of a lack of qualified applicants. Upward Economic Mobility provides participants with the skills and support needed to be successful in a technical education program and prepares them for in-demand careers with family-sustaining wages.

Completing the work required for a certification program can seem like an overwhelming challenge when someone struggles to care for children, find a means of transportation, or learn the English language. With support from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and the NEPA Health Care Foundation’s

Careers in Care program, UNC is working to lift these barriers by offering help with child care, food, housing, transportation, and English language classes. Free training in communication, networking, problem solving, and other skills that help individuals succeed and advance in the workplace is also available. UNC

provides a needs assessment and career coaching to help participants identify a career path that is right for them and create a plan to help them achieve their goals.

Students are then enrolled in one of Johnson College’s essential careers certification programs to train for in-demand occupations such as certified nursing assistants, medical assistants, basic maintenance technicians, machinists, welders, plumbers, and forklift operators. Wages for these careers often range from \$30,000 to \$40,000. The demand for these positions regionally is already high and is expected to grow in the coming years as the older generation retires from the workplace.



CARES Act Funding

In Spring 2021, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) partnered with the City of Scranton, NeighborWorks of Northeastern Pennsylvania, and North Penn Legal Services to help administer The Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Relief Assistance Program funded by the CARES Act Funding. This program provided financial assistance to both struggling homeowners and renters alike facing housing arrears and overdue utility bills due to COVID-19. NeighborWorks of Northeastern Pennsylvania processed mortgage applications while UNC processed rental and utility applications. North Penn Legal Services provided a free Legal Assistance Program to residents who faced eviction as a result of the pandemic.

The benefits of the City Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Relief Assistance Program have not stopped with homeowners and renters. This program has extended needed relief to landlords who are able to maintain ownership of their assets at a time when sales are high for exhausted property owners who can no longer afford to participate in the rental market. Further stabilizing the availability of affordable housing in Scranton.

By learning the specific and local details of COVID-19's damage, we recognized the need for strong advocacy and legal guidance. The program partnered with North Penn Legal services to develop landlord and tenant mediation to decrease eviction and displacement. In total, over \$1M was awarded to help over 200 rental families and 30 mortgage holders.



With a grant from the Moses Taylor Foundation, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern Pennsylvania (UNC) opened a Farmers Market at its Fallbrook housing community. The Grand Opening was held on September 9, 2021 and is open weekly on Thursday's from 2:00-6:00.

UNC has seen firsthand how establishing a farmers' market could benefit the community. In 2010, the introduction of the South Side Farmers Market addressed the lack of healthy food options that plagued South Scranton residents and created a venue for local farmers to sell their goods. One consumer commented, **"It's wonderful to have access to fresh produce, local meat and bread, and other great products within walking distance. We didn't have anything like this in our neighborhood before, and it's filling a great need in the area."**

Both the South Side Market and Carbondale Market offer Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and other vouchers for low-income seniors and families. The Fresh Produce Double Dollar Program, which doubles consumer SNAP dollars up to \$20 a week and allows them to use their Double Dollars to purchase fresh produce. The program has enabled UNC to reach more community members. In fact, the agency has grown its SNAP program from under \$200 annually to over \$2,000 annually (\$4,000 including Double Dollars).



Child Care

All three of United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania’s Child Care sites have remained at a 4-STAR quality rating by the Keystone STARS Program which is the highest rating Pennsylvania offers. Throughout the pandemic United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) has been able to offer safe, affordable, and high-quality Child Care. All of UNC’s facilities are open and actively enrolling children.



Senator Bob Casey visited the Bellevue Center to discuss the importance of quality early childhood education like the programs UNC provides.

Youth Gaming Studio

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way of life for teens who must now face the challenges that come with virtual learning. For some, there is no structure, routine, or even technology. United Neighborhood Center of Northeast Pennsylvania’s (UNC) E-Learning Support Program has been designed to address the educational, social, and mental health needs of teens today. By offering this combination of technology for school work and social connectedness, UNC helps disadvantaged teens thrive along their e-learning journey.

UNC provides a safe, quiet space equipped with laptops and tablets for teens to complete their school work Monday through Friday, from 4 to 8 p.m., with assistance from staff. There are also dedicated areas for youth to take part in video gaming and streaming platforms, which will help them develop their teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and social skills.



Youths have the opportunity to take breaks from school work and reenergize by joining a gaming session or logging into a live stream offered on site. Video games are a fun way to enhance cognitive and creative thinking skills as well as encourage artistic expression. With the live streaming platform Twitch, UNC staff are able to engage and educate the teens on subjects such as mindfulness, leadership, and racism. Some Twitch streams involve no game play but rather serve as a podcast. This is an ideal way for youth to communicate with their peers worldwide and be exposed to a variety of different cultures and perspectives.

Housing & Behavioral Health Initiative

In Spring 2021, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) embarked on the Housing and Behavioral Health Initiative (HBHI) with support and funding from Community Care Behavioral Health. This initiative focuses on providing individualized advocacy, resource navigation, and support for the HealthChoices members of Lackawanna County with a primary goal in mind—keep members happy, healthy, and stably housed within the community and out of higher levels of care.

By the end of 2021 a total of 3,449 people were served. Of this total, 1,551 have individualized and comprehensive care plans which screened for all social determinants of health. As a result of these care plans, the Health Navigator worked with the clients to connect to appropriate resources, both within UNC and at other community agencies, and to develop a treatment plan with the client focusing on self-directed goals.



Healthy Aging Campuses

During the past year United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) was able to reopen all of our Healthy Aging Campuses and fully welcome back seniors. UNC offers diverse and holistic programs and services to older adults and their families through our Community Health and Aging Department. With a focus on health and wellness, our services aim to help older adults age well and independently.



Pine Brook Implementation

After a year-long planning process with residents, business owners, and community stakeholders, the Pine Brook 5-year Community Revitalization plan was complete in the fall of 2021. This plan was submitted to Pennsylvania Downtown Centers (PDC) for consideration for Pennsylvania Keystone Communities Elm Street program designation. This designation will open the door for state and other government funding opportunities over the next five years, as well as provide our organization with valuable technical support from PDC. Implementation committees were formed in the areas of Safe, Clean & Green, Neighbors & Economy, Image & Identity, and Design to create programming and interventions to improve the neighborhood, and participants have eagerly gotten to work addressing the issues and opportunities identified in the plan. Holly Yorkonis, our South Side Revitalization Coordinator, has moved into the role of Pine Brook Elm Street Manager.

While in the planning process, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) found many ways to take valuable early action in the community to address issues and opportunities identified by the residents and businesses. In Spring 2021, UNC hosted a large Pine Brook community cleanup of Sweeney's Beach, the nearby railway area, and Chic Feldman field with partners Lackawanna River Conservation Association, Morgan Development, the City of Scranton and Waste Management. Over 100 volunteers from University of Scranton, LRCA, UNC, Morgan Development, City of Scranton, Cigna, Lackawanna College, NeighborWorks NEPA, The Wright Center for Community Health, Pine Brook residents and more participated in this ambitious one-day event which removed more than three tons of waste and over 150 tires from the neighborhood.



In Spring 2021 a press conference was held at National Bakery to celebrate the release of the draft plan and invite the public, including state, county and city officials to review plan highlights and catalyst sites identified for the transformative interventions. These catalyst sites include Downtown Gateway Placemaking (streetscaping of entrance to the neighborhood at Olive & Capouse Ave), Lower Capouse Social Support Framework (addressing infill supportive housing needs), Riverfront Recreation Link (linking Sweeney's Beach, Chic Feldman Field, and Lackawanna River Heritage Trail) and Penn Ridge Recreation Hub (reinvention of the Penn Ridge Swim Complex). The plans were well received by the community.

Thanks to a grant from the Lackawanna County Arts & Culture Department, UNC collaborated with Jeff D'Angelo's Design Group, UNC Youth Arts Program and Leaders in Training students to create wayfinding signage for Sweeney's Beach along the Lackawanna River in Pine Brook. Our youth program was given this opportunity to work on a real public art project in the community, visiting the studio Jeff D'Angelo for mentorship and to create the signage. The new signage was unveiled at this year's Riverfest at Sweeney's Beach on Saturday Sept 25. Additionally, LRCA conducted an environmental workshop for the students and the public in October. This program supports one of our goals to highlight and enhance the assets already existing in the community.



Feed a Friend Program

Even amidst the ongoing pandemic, Northeast PA residents continued to generously support United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania's (UNC) Feed a Friend Program. This is a collaborative effort throughout the community where we witness neighbors helping neighbors.



UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS OF NEPA COMMUNITY VOICE COMMITTEE

In 2021, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania (UNC) launched the Community Voice Committee (CVC) with the purpose of gathering more community input so that UNC can better serve our clients. This committee of UNC clients has already provided great feedback on many emerging needs in the community. In addition, the CVC helps to develop the leadership skills of community members while inspiring those members to become more actively involved in their local communities. We held two fully remote sessions and were able to conduct a hybrid meeting in November with 16 combined participants! The committee will meet quarterly in 2022 and continue developing these leaders.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS.



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