



# Ready, Set, Healthy!

A Novo Nordisk-Sponsored Program

## Progress Report 2018-2020

Reducing Youth Risk of Type 2 Diabetes and Promoting Healthy Habits in Trenton, NJ

# Advancing Policy, System & Environmental Changes in Trenton, New Jersey

## Why Trenton?

Food insecurity and nutrition related chronic diseases including Type 2 Diabetes and obesity are major areas of concern for the Trenton community. The City of Trenton has 1 full service grocery store for its 84,000 residents, making it a food desert. With limited access to healthy, affordable foods and few opportunities for safe physical activity, Trenton has one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in NJ.

As the Ready, Set, Healthy! (RSH!) partners came together, access to healthy, affordable foods and physical activity quickly emerged as areas of opportunity for improving these health disparities in Trenton. RSH! focused on long-term policy, system, and environmental change efforts that support building a culture of health.

# 30%

Trenton youth diagnosed as having obesity

# 28%

Trenton residents living below the poverty level



## Our Collective Impact Successes

### Policy, System & Environmental Changes

- Expanded the Greenwood Ave. Farmers Market
- Increased healthy food options and offerings at Corner Stores
- Created school/district wellness council(s) & policy
- Improved school food service
- Established and maintained school and community gardens
- Enhanced meal programs through summer food service programs & Breakfast After the Bell
- Adopted the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model

### Direct Education

- Educated students and families about nutrition
- Implemented CATCH, Triple Play, SNACK 2.0 & Heart Smarts curriculums
- Engaged students in taste tests
- Provided cooking demonstrations for students and families
- Introduced gardening education and linked to regular classroom instruction
- Trained Corner Store owners
- Trained school food service staff
- Implemented physical activity on demand
- Provided annual Healthy Living Weekends for families

1. Kania, L., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 35-41.

# About Ready, Set, Healthy!

**RSH!** is a unique partnership launched by Novo Nordisk to enhance the culture of health around young people in Trenton, New Jersey.

The collective impact program began in 2016 and included local organizations that worked together with the Trenton Public School District guided by a shared impact measurement system in order to achieve common goals.

As the backbone organization, the New Jersey YMCA State Alliance coordinated activities and gathered program data to continually guide and improve programmatic efforts.

## The Four Pillars of RSH!

**Ready, Set, Healthy!** is a four-pillared program focused on empowering and inspiring students in Trenton schools to eat better, be more active, and live healthier lives; Focused on helping children avoid diabetes now and in the future.

- **Empower** Parents and Caregivers
- **Provide** Healthy Food Options in School
- **Improve** Access to Healthy, Affordable Food in the Community
- **Create** Opportunities for Fun Physical Activity Before, During & After School

## Community Partners Make the Difference

RSH! partnered with the Trenton Public School District and nine nonprofit organizations to help support Trenton's youth. The constant support and involvement of the school leadership team including Parent Coordinator/Homeless Liaison Denise Kreiss and Supervisor of Nursing Micah Freeman, with School Wellness Council, as well as community partners, contributed to the overall success of RSH!

### RSH! Impact

*“Good nutrition and plenty of exercise are the building blocks for strong, healthy children and lifelong health, and we are proud to partner with this community collaborative. It’s heartwarming to see how excited our students have been about health and wellness.”*

Denise Kreiss  
Parent Coordinator/Homeless Liaison  
Trenton Public School District

# 40,600

Hours of student engagement in nutrition, cooking and gardening education





# Empowering Parents and Caregivers

Good nutrition and plenty of exercise are the building blocks for strong, healthy children and lifelong health. Engaging and equipping parents with resources and tools to support the health of their children is essential in reducing obesity and helping children avoid diabetes now and in the future.

## Everyday Matters, Spring into Health Parent Conference

In May 2019 RSH! and Trenton Public School District welcomed over 50 families to the “Everyday Matters, Spring into Health Parent Conference.” Through interactive workshops, demonstrations, forums, and presentations the conference explored how parents, schools, and communities can work together to improve students’ overall health while also reducing chronic absenteeism. Free on-site childcare and transportation were available so families could take full advantage of the day’s resources.

### RSH! Impact

*“The idea for RSH! came from talking with community members who saw how unhealthy lifestyles were holding back Trenton children. The goal is to get our kids healthier, which will help them in school and on the sports field, and also improve their overall quality of life.”*

Darrin Anderson  
Chief Executive Officer  
NJ YMCA State Alliance

# 1,924

Interactions with parents and caregivers

## Outdoor Garden Inspires Connection with Nature

On May 14th, 2019, the **Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County** opened their Garden, Outdoor Education & Play space. This space provides a safe, creative, nurturing and peaceful environment for learning and growing within Trenton's urban landscape. It enabled kids to play soccer on the grass, learn about the environment in an outdoor STEM class, be inspired to create art in and from nature, read books outside, learn how to grow vegetables and herbs, and later use what they grew in our many healthy cooking classes.

## Healthy Weekend Retreat for Trenton Families

Eleven Trenton families spent Mother's Day weekend in 2019 at Frost Valley YMCA, in New York's Catskill Mountains. Twenty children and 11 adults, ranging from two-months-old to age 67, took part in the weekend and enjoyed a variety of indoor and outdoor activities focused on healthy eating, gardening and physical fitness. On average, each participant took 40,000 steps each day. Families left with great memories and new sport bags equipped with pedometers, water bottles, healthy recipes, and a healthy plan for action. In October 2019, New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids took nine Trenton Families (13 adults, 24 children) to Camp Mason YMCA. Families participated in environmental education and healthy cooking classes, as well as fun physical activities like climbing, nature hikes, canoeing and more.

### Parents and Caregivers

# 866

Hours of events and activities

# 623

Nutrition and health education interactions

# 103

Cooking demonstrations

# 181

Health screenings





# Providing Healthy Food in Schools

RSH! benefits parents and children through nutrition and garden education lessons, physical activities in school and after-school programs, as well as taste tests and cooking demonstrations. Thousands of Trenton kids have participated in RSH!-sponsored events and are now trying new fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.

## Success Stories

### 3rd Graders Learn Healthy Can Taste Good

The Food Trust provided a five-part lesson series that focused on Shopping Smart and Healthy at the Corner Store. The lessons included taste tests of healthy snacks, identifying “Go, Slow, and Whoa” foods at corner stores, nutrition label reading and shopping at a mock corner store for healthy snacks.

### From Skeptics to Spinach Lovers

When Isles staff walked into a classroom with a bag of spinach and told nine-year-old students that they’d be making a spinach salad, the kids were horrified. To transform spinach skeptics into spinach lovers, they followed three fail-proof steps: 1) they reminded students to be open minded and positive, 2) made it a hands-on activity with student participation, 3) celebrated successes such as overcoming the fear of trying new food. As a result, 12 of the 20

## RSH! Spotlight

RSH! has worked with both TPS District leadership and Aramark Food Service to better the school food environment. Improvements have been made to the food itself— menu changes, new standards for decreasing use of additives, increased offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables. Rutgers Cooperative Extension partnered with Aramark to implement Smarter Lunchroom Movement practices into the school cafeterias, including product placement, signage, and food displays to nudge students to select and eat healthier foods.

# 17,037

Participants in healthy food taste tests

students asked for seconds and some wanted to make the recipe at home.

### Cooking Lab Recipes Result in School Menu Additions

Trenton cooking lab students prepared Mixed Bean Vegetarian Chili and gave it a rousing thumbs-up. The vegetarian dish is now on school menus thanks to Wellness In the Schools Chefs and the cafeteria vendor Aramark, that partnered with school administration to provide this popular choice in all Trenton schools. In cooking labs, students make and sample recipes, learn about nutritious food and the chemistry of food and flavorings. The long-term goal is to teach children healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

15,549

Cooking demonstrations

28,214

Hours of gardening classes



## Accessing Affordable Healthy Food

Trenton's Healthy Corner Store Initiative and Greenwood Ave. Farmers Market are community hubs that provide residents access to fresh fruits and vegetables, nutritious food options, health information and health screenings. Colorful signage in the stores explain what foods are most beneficial and visiting health experts suggest ways residents can reduce sodium and incorporate healthy food into their daily diets.

17

Corner Stores were supported by RSH! through The Food Trust's efforts

## Heart Smart Lesson Series

Corner Store owners, Sun Ja and Young Hwang joined the Trenton Healthy Corner Store Network in the spring of 2017. Since then, they've increased their selection of fresh fruits and healthy snacks, offering items such as low-fat yogurt and \$2 cut watermelon containers that their customers grab as an on-the-go snack. In 2019, the Hwangs began hosting The Food Trust's weekly Heart Smarts lessons to encourage their longtime customers to eat healthy and explore new recipes. During the four-week series, Sun Ja and Young were very proactive in letting their customers know about the upcoming lessons and encouraged every customer to participate. As a result, close to 50% of the participants were return customers who often organized their family and neighbors to come.

## New Way Deli Creates Wellness Corner

After more than doubling the healthy product inventory in his store, New Way Deli Market owner, Paul Feliz was super excited to turn an area in his store into a Wellness Corner. Now, customers are able to pick up information about nutrition, health community resources and free health events while waiting for their deli orders. RSH! partners provided health information, healthy recipes and community gardening program brochures. In response to customer requests, Paul also added fruit smoothies to his deli menu.

## Greenwood Ave. Farmers Market

Each season, over 5,000 visitors buy produce, purchase a nutritious snack or lunch, learn about health issues—from the dangers of high blood pressure to the benefits of health screenings—play games, listen to music, dance, and meet and chat with other residents.

GAFM is the only market in NJ to serve meals under the USDA's Summer Food Service Program, and one of NJ's leading markets in SNAP and WIC sales due to its matching dollars incentive program. Through participation in City Green's Garden State Good Food Network GAFM receives Good Food Bucks which provide a \$1:1 match on SNAP purchases. GAFM also has its own incentive dollars, Greenwood Green, with its \$1:1 match on SNAP, WIC, and SFMNP purchases. Together, SNAP shoppers can receive a \$2:1 match when they shop at GAFM. Last season over 97% of these incentive dollars were redeemed, which supports local growers and allows families to purchase more healthy foods.

### RSH! Impact

*"They (customers) really liked the Heart Smarts lessons and are excited to see this program continue. I also had fun sharing with the customers about healthy eating, something we always thought about doing but never did because we didn't know a good way to do it."*

Sun Ja Hwang  
Corner Store Owner

990

Free meals served

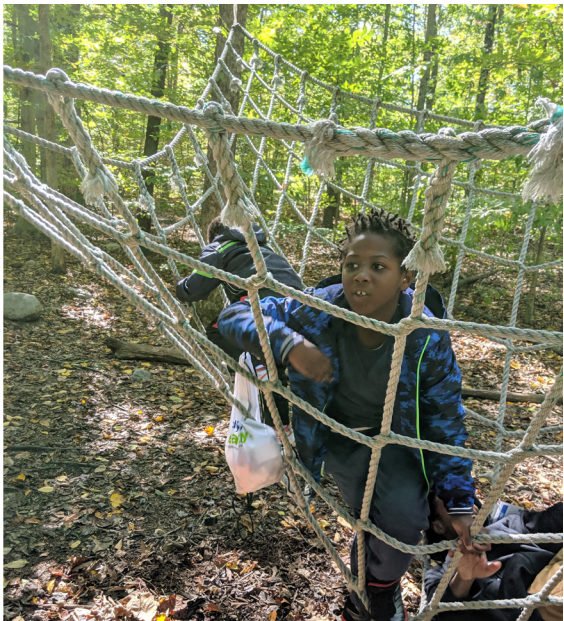
5,010

Farmers Market visits

\$19,294

Healthy food vouchers awarded at the Farmers Market & Healthy Corner Stores





## Increasing Physical Activity

An active life is a healthy life. RSH! Programs encourage children to get active with fun physical activities in safe environments. Activities range from recess games, organized sports to weekend camping retreats to evidence based programming at before and afterschool, and summer camp settings.

### Success Stories

#### Revvig Up Recess

An RSH! grant for technical assistance enabled the teachers and staff at PJ Hill Elementary School in Trenton to purchase over 25 types of recess equipment, including footballs, soccer balls and goals, baseball bases, basketballs, yoga mats, jump ropes and hula hoops. As important as the increased physical activity the children enjoy during recess, is the fun children experience playing with their friends.

#### TCNJ SNACK 2.0

In addition to RSH! program data collection efforts, TCNJ developed SNACK 2.0. SNACK (Smart Nutrition and Collaborating for Kids) was developed and implemented by The College of New Jersey to increase the fitness and health of Trenton's elementary school children. Children were invited to participate in get-up-and-move activities, which vary based on facilities and outdoor space. Children receive "prizes," and other small incentives, to encourage activity.

#### RSH! Impact

*"It's wonderful to see everyone involved working together to ensure that our kids are on the right path to a life of health and wellness."*

Micah Freeman  
Supervisor of Nursing  
Trenton Public School District

Data related to physical health and nutritional knowledge is being collected with parental permission. In addition, SNACK community cafes are operating in some schools to learn about children's likes and dislikes, to improve and adjust the program based on their needs.

### Triple Play at Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County's program, Triple Play has promoted the importance of physical activity and proper nutrition through the program's three components: mind, body and soul.

### CATCH at Capital Area YMCA

Children at the Capital Area YMCA early childhood center benefit from the national CATCH Curriculum to instill habits supporting lifelong health and well-being.

CATCH is designed to nurture a love of physical activity, provide an introduction to classroom-based gardening and nutrition, and encourage healthy eating in children ages three to five. Children are motivated to walk, run, jump, dance and move while playing and having fun.

### GoNoodle

GoNoodle provides short, interactive videos and computer games to teach kids about moving and mindfulness and gets them exercising. Students who use GoNoodle are more focused, engaged and ready to learn. Nearly 650 students participated in the program generating over 13,000 hours of physical activity.

### RSH! Impact

*"Novo Nordisk is proud to have supported the RSH! program, as it ties into our long-standing commitment to improve health outcomes and make life better for children and their families. With our shared goals of positively impacting diverse communities through obesity and diabetes prevention, fitness, nutrition and community-building; Novo Nordisk and the RSH! partners worked to ensure children and their families have the tools and resources to create social and physical environments that foster healthy communities."*

Genevieve Jean-Bart Fadayomi  
Associate Director, Corporate  
Sustainability and Social Impact

# 68,369

Hours of physical activity among  
Trenton children





## Responding to COVID-19

When COVID-19 hit, community priorities shifted in response to the needs of families and students. Novo Nordisk grant dollars were re-allocated so RSH! and other Trenton nonprofits could provide emergency response services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support activities that directly assisted Trenton families:

- Delivering meals, toiletries, cleaning supplies, and holiday gifts to houseless students and their families living in motels
- Assisting with rent/utility payments
- Harvesting and donating produce from community gardens maintained by RSH! Partner Isles
- Distributing additional grow kits and facilitating produce donations from school and community gardens
- Providing weekly emergency grocery orders consisting of culturally appropriate, healthy, well balanced items
- Providing students and families with virtual learning and tutoring support
- Assisting individuals with transportation to medical appointments, getting prescriptions and co-pays and healthy food access

RSH! partners will continue to support Trenton students in living healthy lives during and beyond COVID-19.

### COVID-19 Community Partners

The Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County  
The Capital Area YMCA  
Isles Inc.  
Homefront  
Arm in Arm  
Jewish Family and Children's Services  
of Mercer County  
The Trenton Health Team

Together the 7 grantees supported over 5,100 Trenton residents by providing 46,000 pounds of food, 12,000 meals, and services such as assistance with rent/utility payments, virtual education support/tutoring, and more.

# Ready, Set, Healthy!

A Novo Nordisk-Sponsored Program

*Contact*

**Jackie Bavaro, MPH**

**Ready, Set, Healthy! Program Coordinator**

609-278-9677

Jackie.Bavaro@yalliance.org

## **NJ YMCA State Alliance**

1 N Johnston Avenue, Suite A340,  
Hamilton, NJ 08609

*The NJ YMCA State Alliance would like to thank all the Trenton community members who have participated in RSH! programs and events over the past 5 years; the RSH! and other community partners working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide much needed services; Denise Kreiss and Micah Freeman with the Trenton Public School District for their constant support and advocacy on behalf of Trenton students; Lynn Kaiser for her thorough and ongoing data analysis; and Genevieve Jean-Bart Fadayomi and Novo Nordisk Inc. for their partnership and generous support.*