

# CREATING HEALTHY SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



*Woodrow Wilson students get outside for yoga, games and fresh air.*

## END OF YEAR REPORT

YEAR 3



# ABOUT THE GRANT

NYS Department of Health Grant initiative awarded to Erie 1 BOCES to reduce the risk of chronic disease by increasing demand for and access to healthy food and physical activity. The grant period is June 1, 2021 – May 31, 2026.

Our goal is to create meaningful sustainable change through the implementation of policy, systems, and environmental improvements.

Erie 1 BOCES is proud to collaborate with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County and Go Bike Buffalo to lead the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) initiative, a coordinated, multi-sector plan designed to increase demand for and access to healthy, affordable foods and opportunities for daily physical activity in high-need school districts and their associated communities.

The school districts currently involved in this effort are Salamanca, Randolph, West Valley, Springville Griffith Institute, Lackawanna, Cheektowaga Central, Cheektowaga Sloan and Maryvale. We are also working in Cattaraugus County, the Town of Cheektowaga, the City of Lackawanna and the Town of Springville.

## SCHOOL INITIATIVES

- **Develop wellness committees**
- **Increase opportunities for physical activity**
- **Improve the nutrition environment**
- **Improve SEL Competencies**

## COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- **Develop wellness committees**
- **Develop complete streets and safe routes to school**
- **Improve food guidelines at worksites, community settings and day care centers**
- **Increase physical activity in day care centers**



*The Fifth-Grade Wellness Day at Springville Elementary School provided a variety of activities to promote health and well-being so the students could work on being their best selves. Students rotated between activities, including a workout session, mindful breathing exercises, walking outside, learning about nutrition and making their own trail mix, and taking turns on the Smoothie Bike!*

# SALAMANCA GETS GROWING

In spring 2023, Salamanca City CSD launched an ambitious farm-to-school program. A dedicated committee, comprised of teachers, administrators, school board members, community partners, and CHSC school coordinators, spearheaded this initiative. The committee kicked off their efforts by attending the Northeast Farm to School Institute's summer event in June, where they participated in professional development and coaching sessions, culminating in the writing of an action plan for the 2023-2024 school year.

A key component of the program is the "Harvest of the Month" calendar. This introduces a different locally-sourced item each month to students. The item is featured in school lunches and on social media. As new menu items are introduced, the cafeteria team conducts taste tests and gets student feedback.

A second component is community engagement. This is achieved through cooking demonstrations hosted at the school. This year dishes prepared included chicken pasta, venison meatballs, and bison chili. Participants then received items to recreate the meal at home. This year there have been a total of three demonstrations and six food box giveaways through NY Food 4 NY Families.

Salamanca CSD is also striving to incorporate indigenous foods and culture into the farm-to-school programming. Partnerships have been established with Gakwi:yo Farms, the Seneca Nation farm, and the Native American Curriculum Team (NACT). Through these, indigenous foods, such as Bison Chili, Three Sister's Salad, and Corn Mush with Maple Syrup, are now part of the regular lunch menu. The bison and produce are sourced from Gakwi:yo Farms, and the maple syrup is tapped and boiled on-site in collaboration with NACT during the spring. The cafeteria has been rebranded with signage in the Seneca language.



## My Why: Sarah Whiteway

*CHSC Grant Coordinator*

"Working with the Salamanca farm to school committee this year has been really inspiring!

They have made so many amazing changes in the food they serve over the last couple of years and have really revolutionary plans for the future."



Salamanca continues to add to and innovate their farm-to-school programming. They have installed hydroponics for growing strawberries and tomatoes and each school in the district has outdoor gardens growing edible plants.

In the fall, they will be partnering with Trout in the School Program to integrate aquaponics. The inclusion of this program will help to expand their current Fish and Wildlife curriculum tract for students.

The work and progress that the Salamanca farm to school team has accomplished this year has been amazing!



## Wellness Champions

**John Haley, Food Service Manager**, is a leader in the farm-to-school initiative. He worked hard this year to source local foods, and to create new menu items that both meet USDA regulations and appeal to the students. He is participating in the Chef Ann Foundation Program, which includes incorporating indigenous foods into meal preparation.

**Karen Magara, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations**, has been instrumental in Salamanca developing a successful farm-to-school program. It was her initiative and leadership that created the committee, applied for grants and oversaw the committee's work this year.



We are coordinating with Native American Curriculum Team (NACT) to integrate the "Harvest of the Month" into student instruction by providing teachers with support materials. Salamanca's future goals include helping local farms in becoming NYS Certified to participate in farm-to-school programs, increasing staffing to expand these programs and establish new ones and to create a student-run garden to grow food for the cafeteria and sell at the local farmer's market.



# SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

The grant team has been working to establish strong partnerships with local day care centers, universal Pre-K classrooms and home day care centers to start the health and wellness journeys of kids early! The work they do supports caregivers in establishing healthy food routines and incorporating physical activity into their day.

In the coming year, the team hopes to bring more day care centers and home centers into their work.

*The team preps for pre-school yoga training at Kidz Zone*

## First Steps in Lifelong Wellness

Our team is dedicated to starting youth on their wellness journey at a young age. One of the many ways we support this work are through two training programs offered to day care center and home center staff. These trainings center on starting healthy eating habits and routine physical activity at a young age with children from infant to preschool. In the past year there were 3 PALS trainings and 4 NHE trainings in local centers.

**Physical Activity Learning Session (PALS)** is a 5-part professional development program that evaluates current physical activity practices in day care or home care settings. It provides recommendations for incorporating age-appropriate activities into daily routines, supports increased family engagement, and educates on the impact of physical activity on child development.

**Nourishing Healthy Eaters (NHE)** enhances providers' understanding of nutrition and its importance in child development. The training covers encouraging children to try new foods, family-style dining, and the division of feeding responsibilities. Participants learn to implement healthy, age-appropriate nutrition in an engaging way.



*Kids at the Delevan UPK program head outside to practice throwing, catching and hand-eye coordination*





# DATA DRIVES COMPLETE STREETS

Creating Healthy Schools and Communities has been working to develop complete streets throughout our communities. What are complete streets? They are roads specifically designed to ensure the safety of all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Establishing safe places for people to walk, jog, and bike is essential to creating healthy communities.

Implementing complete streets requires time and resources. The process involves partnerships with politicians, governmental departments, and communities at large. The investment in these projects can be substantial but necessary. To support the need for complete streets across Western New York, GoBike Buffalo created a "Crash Map" that tracks all incidents involving vehicles coming into contact with pedestrians and bicyclists. This map highlights the most dangerous intersections and areas in the region that pose the greatest risk to pedestrians and bicyclists.

This map is instrumental in emphasizing the need for complete streets. The data collected by the map can demonstrate to all stakeholders the impact of not having the necessary infrastructure in place to keep everyone using roadways and intersections safe.



## Facts and Figures

**878** Crashes involving vehicles and pedestrians or bicyclists

**515** Caused an injury

**42** Were fatal


**69%** Happened during daylight hours

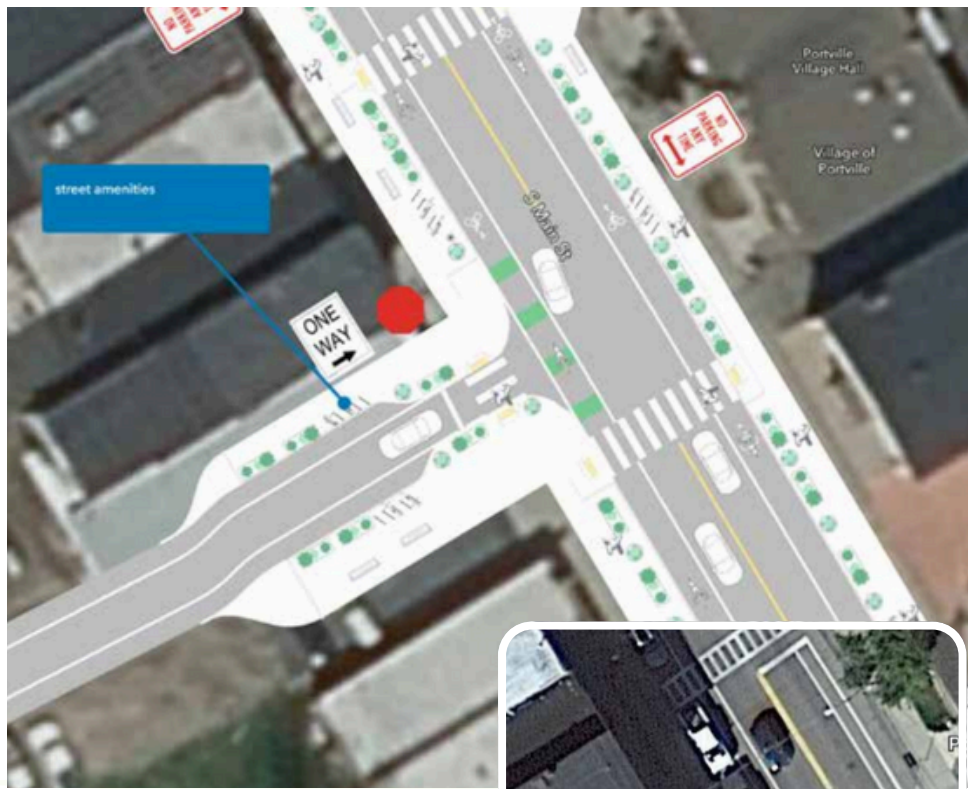
*This data from the GoBike Dashboard represents Erie, Niagara, Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties from January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023*

## Complete Streets Underway

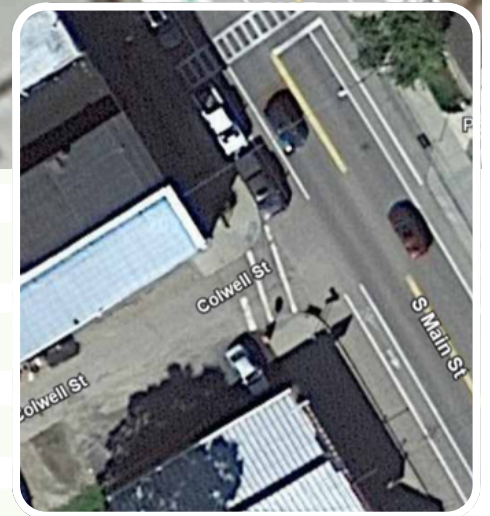
**Cattaraugus County/Southern Tier Bike Trail.** This project will connect fifteen Southern Tier communities when complete. This year it took a big step towards breaking ground.

**Cattaraugus and Portville.** These two communities have completed their design concepts for complete streets. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities held workshops to support this work.

**Maryvale.** A walking audit was completed around the community to gauge how walk-able the streets are. This is an important initial step in understanding the need for complete streets. 



*This rendering is for proposed Complete Streets in Portville, NY. The design includes the creation of bike lanes, no parking zones and curb bump outs as a way to make the intersection safe for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists alike. To the right is what this area looks like today.*



**Trails Feasibility Study.** The Cheektowaga Trail Feasibility Study analyzes three trail sections in Cheektowaga, Lancaster, and parts of Buffalo, Depew, and Lancaster. These trail segments, identified in the 2020 Regional Bike Buffalo Niagara Master Plan, include the Scajaquada Creek Extension to Cheektowaga, Clarence Pathway Buffalo Extension, and Lancaster Heritage Trail West Extension. If complete it would amount to 20 miles of biking and walking trails added to these communities.

### My Why: Justin Booth

*CHSC Outreach Liaison*

“ Every single person should enjoy the same level of access, no matter their income, race, age, physical abilities, or mode used for travel. Travel is a right, not a privilege, and our work strives to make it a right shared equally by everyone.”



We will continue our efforts to build communities that encourage, rather than deter, physical activity through Complete Streets. These spaces for active transportation will not only improve health outcomes for residents but also reduce transportation's impact on climate change. We aim to grow our region's population in a healthy and sustainable way, creating a better quality of life for us all.

# TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

The Creating Healthy Schools and Communities team hosted workshops, trainings, conferences and consortiums throughout the year to support educators and community members in establishing health and wellness programs.

**Play Workshop.** This was a newly created event that invited educators for a full-day on the importance of play! The conference was such a success that the team will be hosting a multi-day consortium for the coming school year. During this consortium educators will learn the benefits of play and how it can be incorporated throughout the day to keep students engaged and moving.

**Wellness Conference.** The annual day-long Wellness Conference welcomed 70 educators and school support staff for a day of learning and networking. Attendees heard presentations about establishing wellness programs within their schools and left with takeaways that they could use to start healthy initiatives when they returned to their district.

**Complete Streets.** Four workshops were held for community leaders and stakeholders about the importance of complete streets. These workshops established a basis of knowledge for all involved in projects and began the facilitation of next steps to target areas of need and render designs.



*Educators and school support staff come together to learn and network at the Wellness Conference.*



*The team traveled to Binghamton, NY for the CHSC Convening which brings together grant coordinators from across the state to network (and do some yoga!)*



*Educators at play during the first ever CHSC Play Workshop!*

## OUR COMMUNITY COALITION PARTNERS

- Springville Regional Coalition
- Lackawanna Stakeholders Coalition
- Cheektowaga Community Collaborative
- Live Well Erie Task Force
- United Way's School Age Coalition
- Supporting Mental Health by Advocating for Resources Together (SMART)
- Food Policy Council of Erie County





# WALKING TOWARDS HEALTH AND WELLNESS: BERTRAND-CHAFFEE HOSPITAL



In 2023-2024, Bertrand Chaffee Hospital (BCH) embarked on a journey to promote wellness among its 350 employees through the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) Grant Project. Recognizing the need to enhance the health and wellbeing of staff, Erin Schwab-George, the hospital's Community & Development Relations coordinator, initiated efforts to increase access to healthier snack options and opportunities for physical activity.

Despite being a healthcare provider, BCH realized there was room for improvement in promoting wellness among its employees. Erin Schwab-George identified a gap in nutrition and physical activity opportunities at the workplace. Erin quickly formed a wellness committee within a week of the initial CHSC meeting. This diverse group included 17 employees from various departments, such as Food Service, Primary Care, Nursing, Dietetics, Recruitment, Employee Health, and Diabetes Care. Community members like avid hiker Chuck and Debbie from Springville Love Inc. also joined, reinforcing the community connection. The partnership officially began in November 2023.

The committee conducted a Food Service guideline assessment and identified several improvement areas. Healthier snack options at the Strive snack bar were often hidden on lower shelves, making them less appealing. The indoor walking path and workout room were underutilized due to lack of motivation and outdated equipment. To promote healthier eating, the committee highlighted existing healthy snacks like veggie straws, granola bars, and nut blends. They organized a sample event to familiarize employees with these options.



**My Why: Jasmine Filkov**  
*CHSC Outreach Liaison*

“Bertrand Chaffee’s wellness committee is so spirited about this work! Within a short time frame, they’ve already created a step challenge, curated a workout space and showcased healthier snack bar options, while also becoming more involved within the Springville community.”

For physical activity, the committee launched a four-week Step Challenge in January 2024, with employees collectively walking over 7.8 million steps. CHSC funding was used to purchase new workout equipment, including an elliptical, treadmill and weights, and plans were made to offer fitness classes.

The committee aims to sustain these efforts beyond CHSC support. Strategies include repositioning healthy snacks to eye level, enhancing the step challenge, and marking the indoor walking path with visible stickers. They are also drafting a comprehensive wellness policy for the hospital. Additionally, Erin now represents BCH in the Springville Regional Community Coalition, strengthening BCH's community presence.

The BCH wellness initiative exemplifies a successful partnership, fostering a healthier workforce and stronger community ties.



## Wellness Champion

**Erin Schwab-George, Development & Community Relations Coordinator**, serves as the head of the wellness committee at BCH. She has built the committee from the ground up and ensured that all areas of the hospital were represented. Her initiative has increased wellness opportunities for BCH employees by starting a step challenge, increasing BCH presence at community events and partnering with coalitions and organizations like Love Inc. and the Springville Regional Coalition.



Next steps for BCH include working with key partners on the committee and Strive (snack bar vendor) to have healthier snacks and food options be identified more clearly at the snack bar and placed at eye level. The wellness committee will also be focusing on creating their wellness policy and continuing to offer options to increase physical activity.



## ELEVATING INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY THROUGH HEALTHY FOODS

Part of the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities grant work is to establish and support healthy workplaces. This year, the team partnered with TMP Technologies/TRS Packaging (producer of the Mr. Clean Magic Eraser) in Lackawanna.

Nearly 90% of their employees come from regions outside the United States, representing nine countries. Despite having an expansive selection of foods available via vending machine, leadership noticed that employees continued to bring food from home. Their preference for homemade meals over processed foods and sugary drinks led the grant team to step in and support their healthy choices.



### Wellness Champion

**Valerie Perez**, a student at Villa Maria College worked to design and perfect the translated slides used in this project. Her professionalism and willingness to take on this challenge made this project possible.



**My Why: Laura Corrin**  
*CHSC Outreach Liaison*

“I love that MD, an employee at the Magic Eraser Factory, has already begun to give us suggestions on how to improve our wellness slides and gain more attention from the staff! It shows that there is real collaboration and engagement happening.”



In partnership with a student at Villa Maria College and the International Institute of Buffalo, the team created translated slides to display in the employee breakroom. These slides emphasized the importance of culturally relevant foods and healthy eating. This initiative not only provided information on nutrition but also celebrated the diverse culinary traditions of the employees, fostering a sense of inclusion and respect for their cultural backgrounds.

Wellness initiatives like this enhance workplace culture and have been proven to decrease absenteeism, reduce employer healthcare costs, and improve employee retention. By promoting healthy eating habits and acknowledging the cultural diversity of their workforce, TMP Technologies/TRS Packaging is creating a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits both the employees and the organization as a whole.



**Learn More!**  
Click play to watch the video.



We will continue to create more wellness slides implementing the TRS staff improvement suggestions and hope to utilize our continued partnerships with Villa Maria and The International Institute as we design our Physical Activity slides next!

# GRANT IN ACTION!

## Maryvale Middle School

The outdoor garden in the Maryvale middle school courtyard was constructed in Spring 2024. The food grown in the garden will be donated to the Flyer's Fresh Market- the Maryvale district food pantry.

## Woodrow Wilson Elementary, Buffalo

Woodrow Wilson Elementary Students have been playing gaga ball at recess this year thanks to the purchase of a gaga ball pit.

## Lackawanna Community Garden

A volunteer cooks a free nutritious dinner using fresh veggies from the community garden at the Lackawanna Community Garden Celebration!

## Arcade Slow Roll

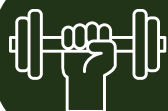
Arcade residents came out to take part in the community's annual Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Slow Roll event. The event invites bicyclists to ride together around the community at a leisurely pace.

## Springville Food Pantry

We're working to identify healthier food choices and better labeling of donated food items. The pantry is working to make the space more accessible by changing the layout of their shelving.

## Strengthening School Wellness Policies

In the summer of 2023 the Boards of Education at Maryvale UFSD, Salamanca City School District and Cheektowaga-Sloan School District all passed stronger more comprehensive school wellness policies. These policies are the culmination of years of work where these districts worked to prioritize student health and wellness.



*Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School's students harvested four varieties of lettuce with principal, Mr. Mochriel*



Maryvale Food Pantry staff, students and volunteers work on constructing a community garden that will help to stock the pantry with fresh foods.



## KATE HUBER NAMED BUFFALO BUSINESS FIRST WELLNESS CHAMPION

Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Senior Coordinator, Kate Huber has been selected as a *Buffalo Business First* Wellness Champion!

Kate is passionate about health equity. Her work promotes the belief that your zip code, your income, your mobility status or your race should not determine your health outcomes. In this work, she helps schools create meaningful sustainable change through the implementation of policy, systems, and environmental improvements. Examples include improving recess, making physical activities accessible to all regardless of ability and reducing in school rewards and celebrations that center on food, so students with allergies or religious observances feel included, too.

Kate is laser focused in improving wellness systems. She will quip that it is easy to pass out apples to students. It is harder to create policies and a school culture that ensures apples are always a choice. Her work is grounded in improving the environment where people have the education, skills, and infrastructure to make healthy choices. It is about shifting the mindset, not offering easy one-day solutions.

### **My Why: Kate Huber**

*CHSC Senior Coordinator*

"Achieving health equity for everyone requires creating sustainable and meaningful policies that align schools and communities with accessible physical activity opportunities, along with the education and resources needed to make nutritious food choices."



▶ Lackawanna middle school students having fun on the new roller skates that were purchased for use by the PE department and to increase physical activity options.

▶ Connecting Communities in Action (CCA) earth day cleanup on the walking trail behind CCA with wellness committee members and other employees. CCA has been a CHSC partner for 3 years now and the walking programs are one of their biggest successes that we have been able to support.



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