

LAKE COUNTY HEALTH EQUITY PARTNERSHIP

In 2014, The Colorado Trust launched the **Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) Strategy**, a multi-phased investment in building a strong and diverse field of health equity advocates to ensure equitable health outcomes for Colorado's most vulnerable. A centerpiece of the second phase of this strategy (2015-2016) included providing financial and capacity-building support to a cohort of direct service, community organizing, and policy advocacy organizations across the state. This support was designed to strengthen individual and collective capacity to "seed" an emerging health equity advocacy field in Colorado.

The following is part of a "**Seeds of the Field**" series of profiles of each of the 17 cohort members funded in the second phase of the HEA Strategy.

Seeding a Health Equity Advocacy Field: The Story of Lake County Health Equity Partnership in Leadville

The Lake County Health Equity Partnership in Leadville (Lake County HEP) is a collaboration between [Full Circle of Lake County](#) (Full Circle) and [Lake County Build a Generation](#) (LCBAG). Full Circle's mission is to help Lake County become a place where children make healthy choices, families thrive, and the community is united. To that end, Full Circle provides a range of services (e.g. social support, behavioral health interventions, child development services, employment support, and immigrant services) to families most impacted by health inequities. LCBAG is a project of the Lake County Public Health Agency, which focuses on addressing the social, environmental, and economic factors that impact the health and well-being of the whole community. Its aim, ultimately, is to build a movement for health and well-being in Leadville and Lake County.

Together, LCBAG and Full Circle partnered to build the advocacy capacity of those most affected by health disparities to ensure their voices drive the changes necessary to ensure equitable health outcomes for their communities. The partnership serves as a remarkable example of how a direct service provider and a community organizing group can work effectively together to address health inequities in their community.

Lake County HEP's work is fueled not only by concerns about major inequities faced by their community members, but also by a frustration that rural residents are so often excluded from health equity advocacy efforts. The partners emphasize that in Colorado's rural high country, residents face critical and unique health challenges that are too often overshadowed by metro counties in statewide health equity conversations. These challenges include a child poverty rate that is higher than the state average (27% versus 18%, according to 2012 Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment data), a large and underserved immigrant population, food costs that are 18% higher than the national average, and extremely high health care costs relative to metro areas.

Lake County HEP's Phase 2 Work

Lake County HEP's work over the course of Phase 2 has been focused primarily on increasing the leadership, equity, and advocacy capacity of community members and agencies working to ensure the community's well-being. Community member capacity building occurred primarily through the implementation of two key programs: the Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI) and Lake County's Promotora Pilot project. FLTI is a 20-week program designed to build community members' civic engagement, advocacy, and leadership skills. According to LCBAG Director, Katie Baldassar, FLTI graduates have shared that they have experienced personal growth and a better understanding about how to effect change and, as a result, several are now taking on leadership roles in the community. Full Circle's executive director, Alice Pugh, adds that Lake County's health equity focus is impacting the larger, statewide FLTI program: "They're really excited about our FLTI program here and our connection with health equity...[we are] helping them look at family leadership training with a health equity lens...which can then trickle out into the whole state."



I think [this work] has created an appreciation that there is a really different perspective out there that we can tap into when we work directly arm-in-arm with the people we most want to be inclusive of and engage with."

– Alice Pugh,
Executive Director

Pugh and Baldassar are equally enthusiastic about the work of LCBAG promotoras, who have been building their leadership and advocacy skills as they work to ensure that community voices are included in key decisions that impact their health. For example, promotoras conducted 238 interviews with community members to understand challenges connected with use of outdoor recreation space. Promotoras shared their findings and, according to Baldassar, regularly attend meetings to remind decision-makers that “I have done this research. And let me remind you that this is what people want.”

One of the most intriguing facets of Lake County HEP’s efforts has been the partnership’s recognition that effective health equity advocacy requires capacity-building support, not just for community members, but also for the agencies that serve them. To that end, another important seed planted by the Lake County HEP was its health equity summer learning series, entitled Building Leadville’s Equity Foundation.


Funded through an HEA technical assistance grant, the learning series was aimed at increasing understanding about and capacity to promote health equity, diversity, and cultural competency among key Leadville and Lake County agencies, government offices, and businesses, and to build organizational will to weave equity into local agencies’ policies and practices. Participants included LCBAG’s promotoras and representatives from 18 organizations representing a range of sectors (e.g. education, public health, economic development, county and city government, and the justice system).

Assessments indicate a range of positive outcomes associated with participation in the learning series, including increased organizational reflection on cultural competency, a greater understanding of and commitment to health equity, and advancements in relationship building and trust among Lake County leaders. According to a Lake County HEP [learning paper](#) about the series, the growth in relationships and trust was perhaps the most successful outcome related to the training:

Participants engaged each other in dialogue about race, class, upbringing, education and health in deeply personal ways. They developed the building blocks for much healthier communications and are now equipped with tools for facilitating the challenging conversations that will need to take place in the effort to build equity in our community.

Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field

Reflecting on the work that was seeded in Phase 2, staff from Lake County HEP note their own growth from the process. According to Pugh, “When we first started this health equity work as a continuum of advocacy, we started at zero because we honestly didn’t



know what health equity was.” She adds that there is still a significant amount of work to do to improve health equity advocacy efforts. At the same time, she believes that “All of these efforts have really moved the needle so that we now have community leaders that are feeling comfortable [talking about] issues that they care deeply about and who are starting to be aware of the impacts of policies.”

Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including Lake County HEP, are launching a new phase of work focused on further cultivating the seeds collectively planted across the state in Phase 2. Ultimately, guided by common values and empowered communities, cohort members will be aligning their change efforts to dismantle structural and racial inequities and build equitable health systems so that all Coloradans can thrive. Lake County HEP is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

Highlights: Lake County Health Equity Partnership's Seeds of the Field

- Greater numbers of community members with the skills and knowledge needed for effective community engagement
- More local agencies and organizations focused on creating explicit health equity strategies
- Stronger relationships and trust across Leadville's and Lake County's agencies, organizations, and leaders

