



**WARREN**  
**HEZ**  
**HEALTH EQUITY ZONE**

**RIDOH End of Year Report**

**July 2023-June 2024**

**Year Three**

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The End of Year Report and Attachments can be found at this link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1lCdj5hQgS87FulFJESCAZn3EEW1RZ-oj?usp=sharing>

### Attachments:

#### Required Documents:

1. HEZ Action Plan and Evaluation Metrics Dashboard
2. Community Needs Assessment Summary / Update
3. HEZ Evaluation Plan
4. Collaborative Membership List\_Partner Summary

#### Other Documents:

5. Children's Activities and Event Calendar Flyer May
6. Food and Meals list\_Warren HEZ updated 2.28.24
7. Draft\_Toolkit Resources for Housing Repairs
8. Earth Rising impact summaries
9. RIDOH HRSA Site Visit Presentation 11.02.23
10. Communications and Marketing: Community Engagement: 2023-2024
11. Outreach and Events Report Warren HEZ 23-24
12. Warren HEZ SNEP SYMPOSIUM\_6.13.24
13. WOYC Proclamation 2024 - Town of Warren, 04.09.24

**East Bay Community Action Program  
Warren Health Equity Zone  
Year-End Reporting  
Program Period: July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024**

**Submitted 7/26/2024**

## **Executive Summary**

Warren’s Health Equity Zone expanded significantly in year three, becoming an integral part of the community’s ability to support our most vulnerable residents, and ultimately create healthy, equitable communities. In year three of their development, the Warren Health Equity Zone (HEZ) collaborative grew in numbers of people involved, strengthened how we partnered with agencies and the town, deepened awareness of conditions impacting residents and reinforced mechanisms to support them.

Warren Health Equity Zone with support from its backbone agency, East Bay Community Action Program, employs a place-based approach to build the infrastructure needed to achieve healthy, systemic changes at the community level and to achieve health equity by eliminating health disparities within the town of Warren. The Warren Health Equity Zone (HEZ) was founded in 2021, and has one office at Mary V Quirk Community Center on Main Street in Warren. Warren HEZ is one of three Health Equity Zones supported by East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP), Bristol, East Providence and Warren.

In State Year 2024 (SY24), Warren HEZ was awarded three grants from the Rhode Island Department of Health totaling \$218,206.01; an annual Infrastructure Grant, a program specific Health Disparities/COVID Grant and a half-year no-cost extension of a program specific Pre School Development/PDG Grant. Additional dollars totaling \$104,102 were leveraged by EBCAP through grants from other philanthropic agencies, however \$75,000 will be utilized in SY25.

HEZ activities were supported by a small Warren HEZ team consisting of one full time Program Director, one part time Program Coordinator, one AmeriCorps member and several short-term Community Health Workers. Additional support was provided from finance, communications and evaluation teams and consultants whose time is shared across the three EBCAP HEZs.

### **1. HEZ Mission and Vision**

(Warren HEZ Mission and Vision statements are under review and have not been finalized)

- To encourage and equip neighbors and community partners to collaborate to create healthy places for people to live, learn, work and play- RIDOH Mission Statement,

## 2. Demographic Information of HEZ Community Served

Warren Health Equity Zone - Demographic Description	
<b>Geographic area served</b>	<p>Warren, Rhode Island, 02885 has three census tracts; 305, 306.01 and 306.02.</p> <p>Warren is the smallest town in Bristol County, with 11,125 estimated population it is sandwiched between larger and more affluent neighbors; Barrington to the north 17,061 estimated population and Bristol to the south with 22,069. (Population Estimate, US Census July 2023).</p>
<b>Description of racial/ethnic groups served in area and estimated population reached</b>	<p>The <i>Town of Warren has a population of 11,125</i> (Population Estimate, US Census July 2023), and is predominantly white and non- Hispanic (91.5%) with a small percentage of Black or African American (1.6%), Latinx (3.3%) and those identifying as two or more races (3.1%).</p> <p>The Town has been home to generations of Portuguese, Polish, Italian, French Canadian and Irish people; many of whom settled here during the town’s period of textile manufacturing. In recent years the Town has seen a resurgence in small business manufacturing, and tourists flock to the restaurants within and just outside of the Historic District. More Spanish-speaking community members from South and Central America, live in Warren and work in the restaurants and hotels in Bristol and Newport Counties. Several refugee families from Afghanistan and Ukraine have also resettled in RI over the past three years. Languages other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2018-2022 is highest in Bristol County reaching 15.6% (US Census 2023)</p> <p>Other notable data to describe the makeup of the residents includes, 25.7% of residents are 65 and older; and, 10.4% living with a disability under age 65 (US Census 2023). Polaris MEP reports that Warren has a thriving and unique manufacturing scene: 33 Manufacturing companies in Warren, employing 824 people and of these companies, 37% of those are food manufacturers. The largest manufacturing employers are WaterRower, Senvias Inc. (formerly TPI), Blount Fine Foods, Jade Plastics and Hope &amp; Main (a Food Business Incubator).</p> <p><b>Economic</b></p> <p>US Census 2023 reports Warren’s median household income in 2022 dollars is \$81,575 and per capita income in last 12 months is \$47,670; and 10.5% of persons in poverty. RI Kids Count lists the area median income, as \$119,914 in their 2024 Fact Book. The AMI does not adequately portray the income levels of the whole town and one cause for a rapid increase in AMI over the last 10 years is due to the renovation of the American Tourister Mill into apartments which has attracted more wealthier renters to their 220 units.</p>

	<p><b>Children and Youth</b></p> <p>1,826 children living in Warren and 2.4% of children in Warren living in households below the Federal Poverty Threshold. 920 children receive medical assistance (for example utilize RITE Care for medical insurance), and 41% of Income qualifying families participate in WIC. Child Abuse and Neglect indicators came down from last year, however, at 11.5%, remain higher than RI's of 11%. 34% of children and adolescents ages 2-17 meet the federal guidelines of overweight and obese. (RI Kids Count Fact Book 2024)</p>
<p><b>Key areas of RI Statewide Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)</b></p>	<p>Warren HEZ addresses 9 key areas within the RI Statewide SDoH. Each key area highlights high priority issues. These priorities have been established through the Community Needs Assessment and have been refined as priorities and work groups progress.</p> <p><b>INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SNAP benefits- Navigators in high-need areas and known as resource to referring partners</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Behavioral Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance misuse, overdose and addiction- Narcan nasal spray and training provided at outreach.</li> <li>• Behavioral health support services- training to reduce climate anxiety; convening BH professionals for Mental Health &amp; Wellness Fair</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>COMMUNITY RESILIENCY</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Social Vulnerability Index Rating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19 support, recovery</li> <li>• Climate change- partnering with town to support under-resourced community members impacted by flooding and future planned retreat; through CHW and work group</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Equity in Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing</li> <li>• Access to healthy food</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Natural Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree Canopy</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Transportation affordability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety of transportation</li> <li>• Alternative transportation methods</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>SOCIO ECONOMICS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Housing Cost Burden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of Living</li> </ul> </li> <li>8. Food Insecurity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work group convenes local providers and connects to resources that include Breakfast and Lunch Program</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>COMMUNITY TRAUMA</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Criminal Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referrals to EBCAP and WRC for victims of violence</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

### 3. Focus Areas of Impact

In May 2023, at the close of Warren HEZ’s year two, the Warren HEZ Steering Committee and staff identified four priorities, coupled with an emphasis on assisting with Resource and Benefits Navigation, as our focus areas in State Fiscal Year 2024:

1. *Food Systems*: Emergency Food, Access & Connecting with Trusted Spaces
2. *Children, Youth & Family*: Teens & Young Adults
3. *Safety & Climate Resilience*: Getting Around Town, Emergency Response & Preparing for Climate Change Impact
4. *Housing Affordability*- Cost Burden, Safe, Affordable; Transportation and Digital Equity

### 4. Funding Leveraged

Funder	Description	Dollars
Earth Rising	Work with students and residents around topics to do with Climate Change and Anxiety	Awarded \$19,769; no cost extension in SY25
RI Foundation- Food Security	Funds used for augmenting Fresh & Frozen Produce distributed in partnership with St. Mary of the Bay Pantry & providing CHW at open Pantry	\$5,000 in produce for Warren families plus staff; larger grant shared across several HEZs and EBCAP Depts.
RI Foundation- Civic Engagement	Incentives/ compensation that helped to increase participation in surveys, events, workshops and work group meetings.	\$4,333; no cost extension through October 30, 2024
EPA- Southeast New England Program Opportunity to Advance Resilience (SNEP-SOAR)	Strengthen Safety & Climate Change Work Group including development of an Action Plan and increasing participation of impacted residents. Coordinate Workshops and Access to Town staff. CHW targets CT305 Families to Increase Connection to Income-Eligible Programs.	\$75,000 awarded February; Program period is July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025

## 5. Major Accomplishments

### Programmatic & Systems Efforts

In 2023/2024 Warren HEZ engaged in a variety of programmatic efforts including, events, outreach, awareness building, support for work groups and the implementation of grants. RIDOH funds helped support activities through grants Health Disparities, Pre School Development, Infrastructure and assisted in leveraging funds the RI Foundation's contribution of Civic Engagement dollars. The goals of these grants intersected, overlapped and drove our success at being more present and active in the community through outreach and events recording a whopping 106 instances. HEZ hosted and attended episodic events in town and committed to recurring outreach at key locations.

Two new single-day events were remarkable because they were held for the first time in the Town of Warren and because of the awareness building and connection that took place with a key demographic and a resource rich set of stakeholders. Warren HEZ and The Collaborative partnered to hold the **Town of Warren's first Pride Event on 6/14/24**. Over 50 participants dropped by to enjoy music, artwork and refreshments; plus learn about the HEZ and their activities. Anecdotally we saw a large number of individuals ages 16-26 at the event, this is a group that we struggle to attract at other events. And many were new partners were mobilized from those who attended the **East Bay Mental Health & Wellness Resource Fair on 3/23/24**. Our mental health fair at the Warren Historic Armory was a success! We held 30 organizations and 124 people came. This event connected behavioral health providers and local non-profits to residents in the East Bay, as well as promoted healthy habits such as Yoga, planting, and a therapy dog visited everyone! The VA Providence and George Hail Library co-hosted with us and the event was heavily promoted to seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. Elsa Schloemer, Bristol/Warren HEZs Program Coordinator, took a large leadership role in organizing both of these events.

In year two, the Warren Housing Authority Director and the Senior Center Director recognized that they would have a gap in resources once the very knowledgeable Senior Center Director Retired the following year. Over her long tenure the Sr. Director had in off hours, and by juggling an overloaded work schedule, managed to support residents from town and from the Housing Authority's managed residences, with their benefits and application navigation needs. And WHA was eager to partner with HEZ to build a new resource to help tenants recertify, something that the WHA team is unable to do, because they are also the monitor and approver. Motivated by an uptick in housing related referrals town wide, to add to this system and close a gap, Warren HEZ entered into an agreement with **NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley to be a host site for an Accessing Home AmeriCorps member** for HEZ year three. This member will serve 1,700 hours from October – August and support residents through direct services, by assisting Seniors and WHA clients or eligible clients to apply for benefits and secure resources that reduce cost burden, push information about food resources and housing programs in Warren HEZ outreach,

at the Warren Housing Authority and through EBCAP's Housing Stabilization projects. This national service member is an example of a Warren HEZ leveraged community resource, in response to needs expressed by partners and to our observation of an uptick in housing related referrals. Megan Conway, Warren's first Accessing Homes AmeriCorps (AC) member has been extremely productive, and through her delivery of recurring outreach the HEZ has increased their contacts with community members dramatically. The AC member assisted 528 (unique) individuals with information, application assistance and referrals for programs such as: SNAP, LIHEAP, Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), Public Housing, Housing information, Senior farmer's market nutrition program (SFMNP). The AC member also distributed informational flyers about town events, health and wellness. They distributed Narcan and COVID tests; and recruited 51 volunteers. A Toolkit for House Repairs was developed to be published on Planner's webpage. (See attachment Toolkit Recourses for House Repairs)

Community Health Workers (CHW) and the AmeriCorps member supported the patrons and volunteers of **St. Mary of the Bay Food Pantry** in different but strategic ways in SY24. Through HD and Infrastructure funding, CHWs partnered with the leadership team at St. Mary of the Bay (SMB) to perform recurring outreach as reliable volunteers moving boxes, setting up materials, helping with food distribution; and to host a resource table at minimum once per week. This **partnership is critical** as Warren HEZ leverages the two open pantry days, for their one on ones or **follow ups with residents needing support with applications**. This has resulted in a predictable location and schedule for residents and referral agencies who need this type of support. A mobile printer, hot spot and hand-held scanner help to reduce the need for residents to have multiple meetings in order to get their application documents complete (sometimes having to leave to get papers scanned or copied, then come back again one week later can result in the client not closing the process as other issues compete for their time). In the spring CHWs and AC member partnered to pilot a similar program from East Providence HEZ, and paired tri-lingual recipe cards from URI SNAP ED with **more fresh and frozen produce**. These supplies were distributed during April, May and June pantry hours and at Kickemuit Middle School. The materials and some of the CHW time was covered by a grant from RI Foundation, facilitated by EBCAP's three HEZs. **22,156** total meals were provided by SMB over the year with HEZ team members on site and assisting.

In SY23 end of year and SY24 mid-year reports, we shared that we were receiving a grant from the Commerce RI to promote the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**. Unfortunately, the grant program was terminated due to the federal grant not being renewed and the effort was discontinued partway through the year. However, Commerce RI staff reported that "Warren enrollment grew from 32% in July 2023 to 39% today. That's 742 residents." The direct support provided through the Senior Center and at St. Mary of the Bay were the most effective locations for increasing the enrollment.

The ability to share and connect people to such an important resource and raise awareness that poor or no highspeed broadband access is an equity issue was facilitated by our involvement in



LIHEAP mailings, well-attended Trunk or Treat events, and via partners such as the George Hail Library and the School District; and demonstrates the breadth of our evolving HEZ network.

The CHWs and AC member took advantage of **Learning Community, other trainings** and learning opportunities to arm themselves with up to date information and to continuously build their pathways to the right person with the right answer, or the quicker strategy, in order to support the residents when asked for their assistance. Staff report these being particularly meaningful: Health Equity Institute's National Preparedness, Medicaid renewal information, Roundtable with MLPB on "Conditions Roundtable: Legal Partnering to Secure Healthy Housing, facilitated by Jeannine Casselman, Medical-Legal Partnership of Boston (MLPB), "Voices of Change: Exploring Current Initiatives Against Food Insecurity in Rhode Island", "Health Equity Data in Rhode Island: A My Neighborhood and Statewide Planning Social Equity GIS Tour," facilitated by Chuck Gurney; and Jay Metzger, Rhode Island Department of Health; Liza Farr, Division of Statewide Planning, Rhode Island from Department of Administration (DOA).

With a small amount of PDG funding this year, we cross trained and iterated on how we could continue to support **Children, Youth and Families**. In year two, helped by a Work Group Expert, Amy Griffin, the HEZ staff and stakeholders went through a data dive with agreement on which few of many priorities the HEZ collaborative should tackle. In year three these issue areas have been layered in to our existing events, outreach and other work group priorities whenever possible. As we enter into year four, we are going to continue to center families in the other priorities, and will not have a standalone work group.

Family Navigator, Natalie Chasse supported one last skills-building workshop for parents "Supporting Self-Regulation in Children" zoom workshop on November 15<sup>th</sup>. This workshop was hosted in partnership with the Bristol Warren Thrive by Five and Beyond and the expert content was delivered by The Autism Project. Participants received a book, fidget toys and a VISA gift card in the mail, post event. 21 individuals registered and 8 attended the full session. The Family Navigator position and the workshop series was funded through the Pre School Development Grant which ended on December 30, 2023.

In February, Bristol and Warren HEZ hired a part time, short term Community Health Worker Danielle DeLuca to continue Health Disparities outreach. Danielle is a parent of two Head Start students and embedded in the community. Danielle attended library meetings, partnered with AC and CHWs at St. Mary of the Bay Food Pantry, attended outreach events in the Elementary schools and coordinated two special programs in collaboration with Head Start. A proclamation declaring the week of April 8-13<sup>th</sup> the Week of the Young Child was issued and read by the Town Council Chairperson, and Head Start Families and Educators attended the council meeting. A third annual WOYC Celebration was held at La Pinata and 123 family members attended. Staff supported two family events at local district schools at Colt Andrews and Hugh Cole Elementary Schools.



Warren HEZ, partnering with Bristol Warren Thrive By Five and Beyond (BWTB5B), continued to produce a monthly Children’s Activities & Events Calendar (see attached example Children’s Activities & Events Calendar May & June 2024). This calendar is unique to the area, relying on partners to feed information to a main person who puts it all together to create the Crowd-sourced calendar in print and posted online on BWTB5B website.

Without dedicated funds for Transition to K activities, we relied on EBCAP’s Head Start Parent Liaison, School District champions and volunteer facilitators to provide a less robust calendar of activities, in comparison to end of year 2023. The partners for this project held two online workshops for parents and shared information in person during Kinder screenings happening at the District’s main office. 97 people heard the presentations, with attendance from Elementary schools are broken down here: Colt-Andrews: 40, Rockwell: 17, Hugh Cole: 32, Online: 8. Volunteer facilitators received a \$85.00 visa incentive.

### **Resident Engagement; Working Groups & Steering**

The Steering Committee continued to define its role and work on the **Governance Document**. The technical pieces of when, where, who and how the Steering Committee serves have been finalized. An expanded group of stakeholders joined the Steering Committee, staff and evaluation consultant at two separate meetings, to build the basis for the HEZ’s mission, vision and values. We received facilitation support from RIDOH program officers Nwando Ofakansi and Nadine Tavares who embedded creativity into the brain storm sessions. A smaller team of Steering Committee members and the HEZ Project Director are meeting to turn this rich discussion and early drafts into a final mission and vision to present to the full committee.



The establishment, rapid growth and productivity of two Working Groups represents a series of major accomplishments. 22 participants attended one or more of 9 **Health, Equity, & Nutrition Working Group** meetings supported by HEZ staff in SY 24. And 48 participants have attended one or more of the 11 workshops and **Safety & Climate Resilience Work Group** meetings.

In September 2023, the Bristol HEZ’s Food & Nutrition Working Group joined with the Warren HEZ’s Food Systems Working Group to create the **Health, Equity, & Nutrition Working Group**. From September 2023 through May 2024, the joint Working Group met 8 times, with an average of 14 people attending each meeting. The Working Group’s accomplishments included a Food Resources list which was posted on the Town of Warren website that includes hours, locations, and services provided by local food pantries, senior centers, meal sites, and other sources of support for residents in need of food assistance. These resources include prepared meals, groceries, food delivery, and targeted programs for seniors and children. (see attached Food and Meals Site List\_Warren HEZ). Working Group member organizations increased partnerships with local farmers and community gardens to increase the fresh, local food available to residents in need, and explored both hydroponic gardens and composting, but ultimately decided not to pursue these topics at this time.

Because this is a blend of two existing groups we were able to do some analysis of the demographic makeup of the group. (10 responses) 20% are Warren Residents; 30% are Bristol Residents; and the remaining 50% live in other communities but work for organizations that serve Bristol and/or Warren. Of the 50% who live outside of Bristol/Warren, 40% represent organizations based in Bristol; 50% represent organizations based in Warren; and 10% represent organizations that are not in Bristol or Warren, but serve both communities. And, using our standardized age ranges we learned that group has 10% who fall within ages of 18-34, 80% are 35-64, 10% are 65+. The team recognizes that there is a good balance between the different towns in terms of participation, both in terms of residents and organization locations. Thanks to this analysis, the group will work on increasing age diversity, such as recruiting seniors and youth.

The **Safety & Climate Resilience Working Group** was very active. Two residents, who are consistent participants in the *Safety & Climate Resilience Work Group*, presented a workshop to share their experiences with reducing **Flood Insurance Costs**. A total of 14 participants attended the session that was held at Market Street Pub to make accessing the site even easier for neighbors. And *Leak Shreak* alarms were provided as an incentive. This workshop was facilitated by two Brown University students taking part in their spring semester class *Writing Climate, Writing Community*.

At the May meeting of the Safety & Climate Group, residents and stakeholders reviewed and discussed the *Natural Hazards & Climate Change* sections of the draft **Town of Warren's Comprehensive Plan**. This type of engagement is important to the Town Administrators as it increases knowledge of the plan and feedback; and important to residents as they are developing leadership skills and confidence to engage in this type of decision-making process.

A small group of residents and stakeholders supported by Elsa Schloemer, Warren/Bristol HEZs Project Coordinator, walked door to door in the Market Street neighborhood inviting neighbors to the Feb. 27 Safety & Climate Resilience monthly meeting. The February meeting included a USDA representative who presented their preliminary findings on Floodplain Mapping for the Palmer River. **28 people attended the meeting, our largest group of residents yet!** As an incentive, participants could sign up for an annual subscription to the local Warren Times Gazette to provide them with press coverage on climate and town related issues.

### **Earth Rising-Student Collaboration Project**

EBCAP's grant writer and two climate writers partnered to submit a grant to Earth Rising, a small private foundation, for the "Writing Climate, Writing Community" to run over an 18-month period, as activity of the Warren Health Equity Zone. The skill and efforts of two Local climate change writers and educators Kate Schapira and Elizabeth Rush and several cohorts of students from Brown University were enlisted to capacitate and augment the skill and efforts of Warren residents to state and document both climate concerns and community-driven responses.

Throughout the Fall, Warren residents, HEZ workers, Brown professors Elizabeth Rush and Kate Schapira, and Brown student interns met monthly as the Safety and Climate Resilience Working

Group, to determine priorities for community climate resilience. In an effort to grow participation from those who are most impacted, four door knocking sessions were held on weekends in the Market Street neighborhood. Funds from the grant were used to implement best practices such as providing incentives, dinner and children activities to remove barriers to participation by residents.

In the Spring, Professor Schapira's writing class at Brown University, partnered with working group members, HEZ workers and community institutions to carry out the community learning and connecting activities outlined below, which were also shared and partially planned at the monthly meetings. (see attachment\_Earth Rising IMPACT Summaries)

1. With the George Hail Library, Brown students hosted a preschool science workshop on soil permeability (one of them, Elizabeth Ding, also wrote it up as a forthcoming article for the Warren Times-Gazette).
2. Climate, Safety and Resilience Working Group member K.Nansen led two Brown students in creating a survey on sump pump ownership and use, data that can be used to improve the town's granular knowledge of flooding and potentially to support a bulk sump pump purchase through the town and/or HEZ.
3. Climate, Safety and Resilience Working Group members N.Smalzel and M.Canario led a flood insurance and storm readiness workshop for Warren residents in a Market St. restaurant, particularly people living in the neighborhood, with outreach and planning support from two Brown students.
4. Working with Senior Center and George Hail Library staff, four Brown students piloted oral history recording sessions with three Warren residents (and shared the sump pump survey in the process), laying the groundwork and learning some lessons for a deeper community archive.
5. Supervised by East Bay Media Group/Warren Times-Gazette editors, student journalist Lydell Dyer covered climate impacts on local athletics, and along with Elizabeth Ding and course TA Julia Vaz Ribeiro, opened a channel for further student and community coverage of climate impacts in and around Warren.
6. In response to resident concerns aired at Working Group meetings, HEZ staff M.Conway and a team of students began preparing plain-language information sheets on Warren's climate, flooding, and hazard mitigation planning.

### **Staff Development, Workforce pipeline**

Members of the Warren HEZ staff and volunteer team, took time to build their own knowledge and practices. Kristin Read, Project Director, completed a 10-week Community of Practice with the International Transformational Resilience Coalition, which organizes Transformational Resilience Coordinating Networks, to prevent and heal climate change and related mental health and psychosocial problems. And on the 15<sup>th</sup>, participated in a 3-hr Hoarding Disorder Workshop held by the RI Hoarding Task Force.

Accessing Homes AmeriCorps Member, Megan Conway completed their Residence Services Certificate, a lengthy process similar to the number of trainings and hours needed to become a certified Community Health Worker. The HEZ is proud to be part of workforce development for a role that is difficult to fill.

The three EBCAP HEZs met throughout the year for joint training and had an opportunity to participate in a site visit with new RIDOH Leader Kristine Campagna and members of RIDOH MCH Program and their HRSA Project Officer (see attached RIDOH HRSA Site Presentation). During our joint training, we tackled topics such as “How are we Supporting Local Systems Change”, “Key Elements of Grant Writing and Implementation”, and “Informing the new Trans Health Survey Engagement Plan”.

Team members built new skills as facilitators. Staff helped shape and facilitate the Connect RI Digital Equity Statewide Workshop on November 9<sup>th</sup> at the Cranston Library. The aim of the workshop was to inform the State’s Digital Equity Plan, and led discussions centered on ‘Health: enabling both healthcare providers and patients to provide and receive care via telehealth options, access to medical records and other online health resources.’ Kristin Read attended the Health and Economic Well-Being Advisory Committees, coordinated by Rhode Island Kids Count as they prepared for their 2024 Fact Book publication. Elsa Schloemer and Kristin presented a session titled “Building Strategies to Move from Climate Anxiety to Action” as part of the Sustainable Communities track for the SNEP Symposium 2024 at Roger Williams University, on June 12<sup>th</sup>. (See attached\_Symposium Presentation Slides) And, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, Kristin joined Jillian Finkle for a follow up Main Street RI Roundtable discussion of the Key Note from the 2024 *Power of Place Summit*.

## 6. HEZ Success Stories / Narratives

### OUTEACH & EVENTS

#### *Warren’s 1<sup>st</sup> Pride Event:*

The Project Coordinator, Elsa Schloemer, noticed that there were no LGBTQ+ Pride events in the Bristol County area. Elsa wanted residents to know that the HEZ is a safe space to go to for resources, and increase safe spaces in Warren. On Friday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, we worked with the Collaborative Lab on Main Street to display a gallery of LGBTQ+ artists, alongside a table of resources different members of the community. More than 50 neighbors, friends and family, visited The Collaborative Lab on Main Street, and enjoyed live music from Lily Rhodes and Miss Maness. We took pride in hosting a safe, fun, and alcohol-free event to connect with fellow community members. We cannot wait to do this event next year!

We even received a visit from a long-time secret pen pal, who wrote to us after learning about the HEZ at the local Senior Center. This person said that they identified as a gay man, but wanted to find more feminine clothing to experiment with. The person had used EBCAP resources but was not out as a gender diverse person in most spaces, so they

wrote to us with a lot of questions and kind words throughout the year. When we opened the doors for our event, we were so delighted to be introduced to this person, wearing a colorful dress, looking so happy to see us! Their eyes lit up when seeing the art, listening to music, and meeting other community members. Our pen pal talked to us extensively and stayed the whole event, thanking us for providing the space to be their true self.

*We Proclaim the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Week of the Young Child a Huge Success:*

Warren HEZ has partnered with local early learning programs to present the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Week of the Young Child to Main Street for the third consecutive year. In anticipation of the week, HEZ and partners drafted a proclamation in recognition that the Town Council presented to staff and parents during a Council Meeting. On Saturday, April 13th, our Week of the Young Child Celebration had the largest numbers to date, with more than 123 parents and children in attendance! Caregivers and children socialized while engaging in arts and crafts, a firetruck, unicorn ring toss, dancing and connected with local resources. This celebration of our amazing early learning centers and talented educators was a bright and colorful fiesta at La Piñata on Main Street!

*East Bay Mental Health and Wellness Fair:*

Warren HEZ's East Bay Mental Health Fair at the Warren Historic Armory was held in response to the VAP Providence hoping to reduce suicide amongst military families, and we were amazed by the response. 32 organizations and groups with tables, and 124 people came to the event. This event connected East Bay located behavioral health providers and local nonprofits to residents in Warren and surrounding towns, as well as promoted coping skills with a chair Yoga class taught by Kate Hawley, a planting table, and a therapy dog that walked around and visited everyone! The VA Providence and George Hail Library collaborated with us and the event was targeted to seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. HEZ leveraged town resources to coordinate a shuttle to take residents back and forth from the senior center, and Corliss Center van brought folks with disabilities to participate in the fair.

**OUTSTANDING REFERRAL WORK:**

*Supporting ESL and Migrant Population:* Community Health Worker, Ari Samayoa, did outstanding work in providing resources to ESL families and individuals throughout the year. Thanks to Ari, an immigrant family in Warren received some relief for their high water and electric bills that they had fallen behind on. The Town of Warren Social Services paid these expenses with emergency funds. This family was also referred out to Rhode Island Works, a welfare program for part-time working parents, to help them get back on their feet. Ari Samayoa also provided EBCAP and HEZ with input on how to better serve ESL clients, and how to support ESL staff in



these positions as sustainably as possible. Ari helped to shape our referral system, so that it is now more efficient and well-rounded.

*Housing Cost Burden Resources:* Accessing Homes AmeriCorps Member, Megan Conway,



helped many individuals in Warren with LIHEAP (Low Income Heating Assistance Program) applications and signed up many people for the RI Housing Portal waitlist. She helped support the Senior Center significantly, doing outreach there twice per week. She also did outreach at St. Mary's food pantry twice per week, every Tuesday and Wednesday. These times were office hours to help individuals with applications, which greatly reduced their living cost burden.

*Food Security:* A LIHEAP case worker reported to Warren HEZ that an individual in Warren was recovering from surgery and stuck in their apartment without any food. Elsa Schloemer, Project Coordinator, dropped off several Hope and Main's Nourish Our Neighbor frozen meals at the person's doorstep soon after, alongside a pamphlet of resources. We also connected the individual with a delivery from St. Mary's food pantry the next day!

*Family Resources:* A single mom in Barrington came to the food pantry, reporting to HEZ outreach workers that she was at risk of eviction. Warren HEZ referred her to funds from the Spencer Trust Program. Months later she fell behind and was evicted, so she reached out to the HEZ again and we assisted with enrolling her in the CES waitlist and also connected her with a case manager from FCCP. FCCP then funded the family with hotel stay while family shelters were full. Without us in the community, families often would not know where to go in a crisis.

## 7. Looking Forward, State Fiscal Year 2025

*Administratively,* the East Providence, Bristol, and Warren Health Equity Zones remain fortunate to share the backbone agency of East Bay Community Action Program, the support of which cannot be overstated. In addition to the regional strategies to address health disparities detailed earlier in this report, the access to social, medical, and behavioral health staff and services has been invaluable. New staff are able to immediately connect with subject matter experts across different departments, and programming opportunities are expanded due to the wealth of knowledge and partners at our fingertips. EBCAP also continues to provide administrative support to the three HEZs, including human resources, finance, and communications.

In the last quarter of the program period, the State's HEZ network needed the Program Leads and Backbone Agencies to redirect considerable time and energy to managing the news that our funding was in jeopardy, and that immediate advocacy campaigns were required to ensure we could receive at least a partial infrastructure grant and work to have

the State of RI's budget provide and close the funding gap. At the time of submission Warren HEZ is still unclear if they will have additional funds. For a small team, in its first years, this eroded confidence from partners, residents and staff that the work was sustainable; and drained capacity that should be directed at our main charge of supporting residents, action and solutions.

EBCAP bears the financial and administrative burden for supporting the HEZs, and recently needing to agree to find resources and redirect teams to help shore up our budget shortfall. That EBCAP is not able to charge a federally approved indirect cost rate to support administrative functions is an ongoing challenge. As we head into Year 4, we plan to look outside of RIDOH and identify new and sustainable funding streams that include funding support for backbone organizations. HEZs are complex initiatives, with complex financial and administrative requirements; allowable expenses should reflect the time and dedication required of backbone organizations to support these requirements.

With limited *Evaluation* funds for 2024-2025, it will be even more critical to collaborate across the three HEZ sites to maximize resources, focus on building staff capacity, and prioritize sustainable data collection and evaluation strategies. With this in mind, we anticipate the following main Evaluation Activities across all three EBCAP HEZ communities:

1. Maintain the standardized data collection online resource library built in 2023-2024 for all three sites; expand where needed to reflect any new requirements or areas of focus. And maintain fidelity to the data collection plans to ensure we can document and demonstrate outcomes and change over time
2. Work collaboratively to sharpen our focus on aligning process and outcome measures with data collection and activities, strengthening our ability to demonstrate outcomes. Expanding data collection to encompass climate change-related activities, a critical area of work for the Warren HEZ in 2024-25
3. Continue to focus on data collection from relevant, existing sources to inform each HEZ's work and support community capacity to discuss and utilize data to drive action and overall focus.
4. Utilize the HEZ evaluation consultant in a more consultative manner, providing targeted technical assistance to build our internal data collection and evaluation capacity.  
In addition, if time and resources allow, as a joint team, we would like to:
5. Experiment with new ways to share the impact of our work through case examples and "telling the story" collectively and individually for each HEZ.
6. Seek resources for a pilot evaluation to understand better how HEZ can address social isolation in their communities, given the now demonstrated health and well-being impacts that lack of social engagement can have on individuals



Focus Areas will shift in SY 25. The Steering Committee in April and May of 2024, evaluated the challenges presented by diminished RIDOH funding and the opportunities/trends that have surfaced. The decision to 'go deeper' on three priorities: Housing Affordability, Climate and Food Insecurity provides the team and the collaborative with their frame for Year 4. Woven in to each priority will be supports and perspectives that encompass Behavioral Health and Children, Youth and Families.

Two grants will help further shape the ongoing Environmental Justice work.

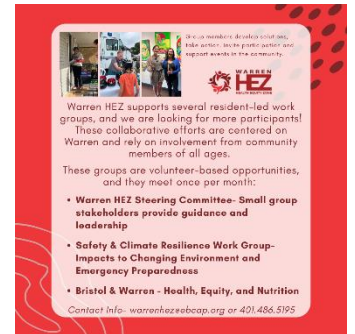
Warren HEZ has been awarded a \$75,000 grant from EPA/ SNEP/ SOAR to support the platform and actions of the Safety & Climate Resiliency Priority Work Group, and is one of four municipalities participating in a RI DEM grant to inform the State of RI Climate Strategy Plan 2025. RIDOH has been awarded a PRO Housing grant that will incorporate the work of HEZs in Bristol and Washington Counties, propelling our work of raising awareness of cost burdened households and turning the tide of public opinion towards Yes-In-My-Backyard. And, in the first 7 months of the year Warren HEZ will work with a consultant to partner with two local food pantries to develop structures that will provide local level data, lifting up any community groups who are not being served so that we may target new strategies for engaging and reducing food insecurity for all.

## 7. HEZ Impact Summary

Warren HEZ will continue to build on their evaluation efforts. And we are excited by the possibility to lend support to the local pantries to standardize their data collection, helping us meet a goal to create local level data.

The Work Groups and Steering Committees are exciting places to engage residents and stakeholders into the Collaborative. And the current natural areas for the HEZ to bring an equity lens as the town, state and federal agencies put additional resources.

The Safety & Climate Resilience Working Group has become an established space for residents and stakeholders to gather. 10 monthly meetings were held between September and June and attendance grew to its largest number of 28 (not including staff) in March for the presentation on Flood Plain Mapping by a representative of the USDA. During this time a consistent core of participants have emerged who attend most sessions and have taken on leadership opportunities: one member became our Work Group Champion and helps to plan and lead the monthly agendas; two members presented their personal experiences on reducing flood insurance premiums and preventing property loss during a workshop on Market Street; and many recommended strategies such as distributing leak screech alarms to residents who complete surveys or open the door for discussions or agreeing to host an info table at the summer concert series to engage more residents. Warren HEZ Steering Committee Members are provided with a monthly update of activities, and staff have presented information about



activities to the Town of Warren's Conservation Commission, the Town Planner and Town Manager.

In June, the resident-led Safety & Climate Resilience Work Group achieved an 'engagement' milestone, by reviewing a draft of the Town of Warren's Comprehensive Plan and preparing comments to be submitted in paper form and read aloud during the June 24<sup>th</sup> Planning Board meeting. The group had a structure within which to build confidence to prepare and present which elements should be considered urgent, ask for timelines, and pledge to be a citizen resource as implementation of the Comp Plan begins to take shape.

In September 2023, the Bristol HEZ's Food & Nutrition Working Group joined with the Warren HEZ's Food Systems Working Group to create the Health, Equity, & Nutrition Working Group. The Working Group's accomplishments include: a Food Resources list that was posted on the Town of Warren website that includes hours, locations, and services provided by local food pantries, senior centers, meal sites, and other sources of support for residents in need of food assistance. These resources include prepared meals, groceries, food delivery, and targeted programs for seniors and children. A new Food Pantry was opened at Kickemuit Middle School, building on previous relationships between the school and both St. Mary of the Bay's Food Pantry and East Bay Food Pantry. Working Group member organizations increased partnerships with local farmers and community gardens to increase the fresh, local food available to residents in need. And, the Working Group will continue to provide a forum to raise awareness, share ideas, and cooperate toward beneficial outcomes. The group will work on an action plan that plugs gaps in the system to identify needs, share resources, and address barriers to food access.

As anticipated the HEZ impacts have radiated outward from the experiences and insights of the working groups. The new town planner now has a close relationship with the HEZ staff and leverages the group for feedback on items such as comments to the new Comprehensive Plan, letters of support for grants that require community engagement, and developing additional supports for under resourced community members, especially renters and older home owners, who are coping with the negative impact of flooding more than their wealthier neighbors. The planner and social service offices have agreed to post HEZ developed tools and information on the town website. George Hail Free Library is an active partner and space for sharing information about flooding, which will aid in the town's completion of a Community Rating Scale to reduce overall insurance rates. And, Warren successfully partnered regionally with East Providence, Barrington, and Bristol to apply for a RI Department of Environmental Management for a community engagement process, the findings to be shared with the state as part of their 2025 Climate Strategy.

Communication Strategies have been enhanced. At all events that HEZ staff attend or support attendees are asked to sign up for our mailing list, and during this grant period the lists have increased. Warren HEZ has increased to 308 contacts in the overall distribution list. Contacts receive bi-monthly emails connecting them to activities. (see attached Communications & Marketing: Community Engagement Summary)