



## Nashua HEAL TREE STREETS PROJECT

"I have been working with our Division of Public Health and Community Services and others to start a community garden on the Rail Trail section that PAL had adopted. It's near the community center. It's a high-traffic area. I think it will answer a lot of the questions about security."

Shaun Nelson, Executive Director  
Nashua Police Athletic League (PAL)

### Nashua HEAL's Tree Streets Neighborhood Project Achievements

- Neighborhood residents and local nonprofit agencies created a community garden adjacent to the Heritage Rail Trail
- Nashua HEAL promoted use of the Heritage Rail Trail through creation of interest centers, maps, and additional improvements



Heritage Rail Trail,  
Nashua

**HEAL NH • Healthy People Healthy Places • [www.healnh.org](http://www.healnh.org)**

HEAL NH funding is provided by HNH Foundation, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation, Endowment for Health, NH Charitable Foundation, and NH Department of Health and Human Services.

Nashua is New Hampshire's second largest city with 86,933 residents.

Recent data has shown that two-thirds of the Nashua population is either overweight or obese, and 17.4% of 3rd grade students were obese. 9.3% of residents are below the poverty level, and the unemployment rate is at 6.2%.

These trends are more pronounced in certain areas of Nashua, including the Tree Streets Neighborhood. For example, poverty levels for households in the Tree Streets are about 3 times higher than in the City and approximately 80% of the 500+ students at the neighborhood's Ledge Street Elementary School is eligible for free or reduced lunch.

This project focused on improved access to healthy food options and safe physical activity in the Tree Streets Neighborhood.

Source: Tree Streets Neighborhood Analysis and Overview, 2012

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## Healthy People Healthy Places: Addressing Obesity in New Hampshire

In 2008, New Hampshire's first Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Action Plan was launched, followed by the release of the state's second obesity prevention plan in 2014, the Healthy People Healthy Places Plan. These plans were developed through a collaborative effort of public- and private-sector partners to address the increasing overweight and obesity rates within the state's population, particularly in highest need communities.

Since 2008, the HEAL Home at the Foundation for Healthy Communities has led implementation of the healthy eating active living strategies outlined in these plans with support from philanthropic and government organizations, partners across multiple sectors, including public health, land use and planning, transportation, education, health care, and food systems. The HEAL Community Grant Program (CGP), was established in 2009 to provide funding and technical support to promote healthier people and places at the local level. In 2009, four community coalitions received three-year grants of \$150,000. In 2012, four more coalitions – Ashland, Berlin, Laconia, and Nashua – received two-year \$10,000 grants. The HEAL Home provided communications, community assessment, and coalition building technical assistance. This case study highlights the Nashua HEAL coalition's achievements and progress in Nashua's Tree Streets Neighborhood.

## Nashua HEAL's Priorities and Partners

In 2010, The City of Nashua Division of Public Health and Community Services (DPHCS) conducted a Community Health Assessment, followed by the development of a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) which included obesity prevention as a priority area. A CHIP workgroup dedicated to fighting obesity in Nashua was created consisting of hospitals, health centers, schools, businesses, community service organizations, and other key stakeholders. The City of Nashua Community Development Division also initiated the Nashua Tree Streets Neighborhood Plan to help improve and revitalize open spaces for a healthy, active environment that promotes exercise and play for the underserved populations in this area of the city.

HEAL funding initiated a municipal project to improve the environment in the City's Heritage Rail Trail in the Tree Streets Neighborhood. The Nashua HEAL coalition was led by the DPHCS and included the CHIP workgroup that was led by both DPHCS and the Nashua YMCA. Multi-sector partnerships throughout the process included the Police Athletic League (PAL), Marguerite's Place Inc., Greater Nashua YMCA, Nashua Regional Planning Commission, NeighborWorks Southern NH, Southern NH Services, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, United Way, Rivier University, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Nashua, Healthy at Home, Nashua Parks and Recreation Department, UNH Cooperative Extension, Home Health and Hospice, Nashua Pediatrics, St. Joseph Hospital, and Nashua School District.



# CASE STUDY: Tree Streets Project

## Community Garden

**Goal:** Increase fruit and vegetable availability by establishing a community garden adjacent to the Heritage Rail Trail

- Utilized HEAL funds and community volunteers to build community garden
- Several community organizations “adopted” garden to help maintain and promote its use
- Garden became community hub for nonprofit programming and recreation for residents
- Provided education to residents on gardening

## Heritage Rail Trail Improvements

**Goal:** Provide increased opportunities for physical activity through safety, security, and aesthetic improvements along the Heritage Rail Trail

- Organized community rail trail clean-up
- Installed lighting to make trails safer
- Positive Street Art painted colorful murals to improve aesthetics
- Provided signs and conducted an educational, promotional, and outreach campaign to increase awareness of the trail improvements and engage community members in ongoing project activities

## Leveraging the HEAL Grant for Additional Funding and Resources

The HEAL project gained recognition across the city. Nashua was awarded \$121,000 in additional funding over the two-year grant period, as well as several in-kind donations. Funds resulting from HEAL implementation are listed below.

Date	Amount	Description
January 2013	\$3,500	Grant to support We Can! and CATCH pilot at Amherst Street Elementary School
January 2013	\$8,500	NeighborWorks grant for 6 coalition members to attend Community Leadership Institute
August 2013	\$35,000	PAL and the YMCA received \$35,000 grant award from the Citizens Foundation Growing Communities Initiative
December 2013	\$10,000	YMCA received a NH Charitable Foundation grant to provide administrative resources for the obesity workgroup
December 2013	\$10,000	YMCA committed match funds to support the administrative resource funding received from NH Charitable Foundation
December 2013	\$25,000	YMCA received a bike-pedestrian grant through an anonymous fund of the NH Charitable Foundation
April 2014	\$5,000	YMCA received a second bike-pedestrian grant through an anonymous fund of the NH Charitable Foundation
May 2014	\$2,000	HNH Foundation grant to support obesity workgroup coordinator staffing

## HEAL Efforts Continue in Nashua

The success of the community garden and trail motivated others to contribute and inspired additional activities. The Nashua HEAL coalition implemented additional initiatives including We Can! and the CATCH curriculum pilot program at one elementary school and one early childhood center; WALK (Nashua) sign project; rail trail engineering study to connect the Heritage Rail Trail and Mine Falls Park; Tree Streets Neighborhood pride sticker campaign; and research for workplace wellness program options for small businesses. A Plan4Health Nashua Complete Streets project was launched in late 2014 supported by a \$125,000 American Planning Association grant.

## Heritage Rail Trail Improvements Bring Community Together While Providing Healthy Food and Physical Activity

The Heritage Rail Trail and community garden project started as a collaboration with the City of Nashua’s Division of Public Health and Community Service and HEAL NH to bring healthier food options and opportunities for safe physical activity to the Tree Streets Neighborhood of Nashua.

Residents and organizations in this neighborhood have embraced the project, volunteering with the trail clean-up efforts and the build-out of the community garden. A mural from Positive Street Art helped beautify the area around the trail. Once considered unsafe and neglected, people are now on the trail more and growing fresh produce in the garden.

According to Shaun Nelson, Executive Director of Nashua Police Athletic League (PAL), a lead organization in the development of the community garden, “There seems to be more of a sense of community, residents are stopping and having conversations with their neighbors. And neighborhood kids and their families are using the garden and enjoying the Rail Trail more.”



Residents of the Tree Streets Neighborhood came together to help build a new community along the Rail Trail

and the Plus Company, an organization that serves individuals with special needs, also uses the garden.

Other members of the community have contributed to the project’s success. Positive Street Art, painted a mural that helped beautify the trail and bring a sense of pride to the community.



Positive Street Art mural along Heritage Rail Trail, Nashua



“Positive Street Art’s mission is to use art to build stronger communities, so when we heard about this project we really wanted to collaborate,” said Ramirez. “As soon as I started on the mural, people would stop and want to talk about it. They were really interested and they said they thought it was really great for the community.”

Ramirez said that he now uses the Rail Trail all the time and sees other community members using it more too.

“I hope that the mural will inspire others to go out there in the community and get involved, use the trail and the garden and enjoy the neighborhood,” said Ramirez.



Community walk along the Heritage Rail Trail, Nashua