

INITIATIVES FOR A STRONGER COMMUNITY

MARK C. POLONCARZ
ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

MARCH 2015



TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	2
ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY	2
REPORT ORGANIZATION	3
WHAT LIES AHEAD	5
JULIO BAEZ RAMOS	6
EMPLOYMENT & FINANCIAL SECURITY	7
EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY	8
THE YEAR AHEAD	10
BEYOND 2015	17
CONCLUSION	19
ELVIRA AND CALVIN NORTHINGTON	20
STRONG FAMILIES, STRONG SCHOOLS, STRONG CHILDREN	21
EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY	22
THE YEAR AHEAD	23
BEYOND 2015	30
CONCLUSION	31
ELSIE (DOLLY) MANGOLD	32
LIFELONG HEALTH	33
EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY	33
THE YEAR AHEAD	34
BEYOND 2015	39
CONCLUSION	40
ZAW WIN	41
HELP WHERE AND WHEN IT IS NEEDED	42
EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY	42
THE YEAR AHEAD	44
BEYOND 2015	54
CONCLUSION	55
CONCLUSION	56

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AARP.....American Association of Retired Persons

ACCES-VR.....Adult Career and Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation

ADA.....Americans with Disabilities Act

BECFPC.....Buffalo & Erie County Food Policy Council

BECPL.....Buffalo and Erie County Public Libraries

BOCES.....Boards of Cooperative Educational Services

BPC.....Buffalo Psychiatric Center

BPS.....Buffalo Public Schools

CASAC.....Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor

CCRN.....Child Care Resource Network

CDA.....Child Development Associate certificate

CDBG.....Community Development Block Grant

CDSMP.....Chronic Disease Self-Management Program

CPS.....Child Protective Services

DSMP.....Dibetes Self-Management Program

ECC.....Erie Community College

ECDEP.....Erie County Department of Environment & Planning

ECDMH.....Erie County Department of Mental Health

ECDOH.....Erie County Department of Health

ECDSrSv.....Erie County Department of Senior Services

ECDSS.....Erie County Department of Social Services

ECEEO.....Erie County Equal Employment Opportunity

ECIDA.....Erie County Industrial Development Agency

ECMCC.....Erie County Medical Center Corporation

ECOD.....Erie County Office for the Disabled

ECPA.....Erie County Office of Public Advocacy

ECPD.....Erie County Probation Department

ECRTF.....Erie County Reentry Task Force

ECVSA.....Erie County Veterans Services Agency

EEOC.....Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

EPA.....Equal Pay Act

ICAP.....Intensive Community Asset Program

IDEA Center.....Inclusive Design and Environmental Access Center

NFTA.....Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

NYSDCJS.....New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services

NYSOMH.....New York State Office of Mental
Health

PIVOT.....Placing Individuals in Vital
Opportunity Training

REDC.....WNY Regional Economic
Development Council

RFP.....Request For Proposal

SNAP.....Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
Program

TANF.....Temporary Assistance for Needy
Families

UB/EOC.....University at Buffalo Equal
Opportunity Center

UWBEC.....United Way of Buffalo and Erie
County

WIB.....Workforce Investment Board

INTRODUCTION

Erie County is a diverse community, rich with assets and overflowing with resurgence. Evidence of this revitalization is everywhere with advanced manufacturing at the former sites of Bethlehem and Republic Steel, the construction of HARBORCENTER, the all-season activity at Canalside Buffalo, exploding growth at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, and a vibrant arts and cultural sector. This resurgence has made a difference in the lives of Erie County residents. It has created jobs, earnings are on the rise, and the number of people living in poverty is dropping.¹ Consider the following statistics which highlight the turnaround that Erie County is beginning to see:²

- Median household income in Erie County is \$51, 245—7.8 percent higher than in 2011.
- Family households are doing even better, with a median income of \$66,071 compared to \$61,939 just two years earlier.
- The gender gap in wages has narrowed. The difference in median full time wages between men and women fell from 26.2 percent in 2011 to 19.7 percent in 2013.
- The percent of children under the age of 5 that are living in poverty has dropped from 32.8 percent to 23.8 percent.

While the rebirth our community has seen is unprecedented in our lifetimes, without question, Erie County could be stronger. Many tough issues continue to plague our community including persistent economic disparity, high rates of chronic disease and high risk health behaviors, limited access to healthy food, and less than satisfactory

educational outcomes. In several of these areas, progress is being made but more must be done. Here is a particularly compelling statistic: In 2011, 55.8 percent of unmarried mothers, heading up their own household, with children under 5 had incomes at or below the poverty level. That percentage had dropped to 48.1 percent in 2013.³ Although this is a marked improvement, it certainly remains unacceptably high, and points to a continued need to help women in a variety of ways from finding good jobs and negotiating fair wages, to helping to ensure there are adequate childcare options available throughout our community.

This is not an isolated instance. Although indicators show that the County as a whole is better off than it was a few short years ago, some of Erie County's residents are not reaping the benefit of this upswing to the same extent as others. For example, older adults on relatively fixed retirement incomes are, understandably, not benefitting from a greater supply of jobs in the local economy. Moreover, poor health outcomes also continue to be more likely here than in other counties in New York State. The following statistics point to specific areas where Erie County could be stronger:

- The percent of older adults living in poverty has inched up in recent years, from 8.5 percent in 2011 to 9.3 percent in 2013.⁴
- Residents of Erie County report more “physically unhealthy days” than their counterparts across New York State—3.9 in the past 30 days, compared to 3.5.⁵
- Six percent of Erie County residents report having limited access to healthy food compared to two percent in NYS.⁶

¹Sources: CA30 Regional Economic Profiles; Bureau of Economic Analysis. Updated November 20, 2014 and 1 year estimates from American Community Survey 2011 and 2013.

² Source: 1 year estimates from American Community Survey 2011 and 2013.

³ Source: 1 year estimates from American Community Survey 2011 and 2013.

⁴ Older adults age 65 and older. Source: 1 year estimates from American Community Survey 2011 and 2013.

⁵ Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2014

⁶ Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2014. Percent of population that is low income and does not live close to a grocery store.

- Sixteen percent of Erie County residents report having severe housing problems.⁷

Interestingly, regions that are experiencing economic resurgence, especially those that include growth in high-tech and knowledge-based industries, actually run the risk of creating even greater economic disparity than may have existed prior to the resurgence.⁸ We cannot let this incredible “New Buffalo”—this “New Erie County”—benefits just a select few. All boats can rise with the tide.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Initiatives for a Stronger Community is the Poloncarz Administration’s health and human services action plan for Erie County government based on the idea that it is unacceptable for a newly revitalized Western New York to leave behind significant portions of our community when we can effect positive change in their lives. As such, the plan outlines specific measures that Erie County government will undertake to improve the quality of life for residents in need. *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* is grounded in compassion and premised on two fundamental principles:

1. **County government represents everyone:** Erie County government does not just represent the taxpayers—it represents everyone— from our youngest child, to our oldest adult, to our newest immigrant, and our most vulnerable resident, regardless of race, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status. We as a community have a

duty to ensure all of our residents are given the same chance – as level a playing field as possible – to advance themselves; and

2. **Government is an essential partner, and where appropriate, it can and should lead:** For too long we have been told government cannot be a solution to a problem because government is the problem. The Poloncarz Administration rejects that premise because strong, organized, and above all *effective* government, working in partnership with the private, non-profit, philanthropic, religious, and academic sectors, can be part of the solution to the problems that ail us. And, in many instances, not only is government an essential partner, but also an essential leader. When the other sectors cannot or will not step up to solve tough issues, government must not back away from its duty to represent everyone and provide leadership.

Throughout the plan, one will find initiatives that reflect these key values. They are inclusive, work to address needs and create opportunities, embrace both leadership and partnership, and support the ongoing efforts of others to build a stronger community.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY

It is important to recognize that *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* was not developed in a vacuum. Good work in our community has been done in recent years to contribute to the progress we are already experiencing. Much of this work has, for good reason, been focused on the local economy

⁷ Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2014. Includes overcrowding, high housing costs, and/or lack of kitchen or plumbing

⁸ See “America’s Most Economically Segregated Cities” by Richard Florida. February 23, 2015
<http://www.citylab.com/work/2015/02/americas-most-economically-segregated-cities/385709/>

because well-paying, stable jobs, widely accessible to all our residents, are paramount to having a stronger community. As such, *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* seeks to align with several important regional planning documents focused on our local economy.

Two such documents, both produced by the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (REDC), are, *A Strategy for Prosperity*, released in November 2011 and, *A Path for Renewal: Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan* (the “Buffalo Billion”), released in February, 2013. The REDC commissioned critically important research to identify key growth sectors in the regional economy. Sectors such as advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, workforce development, tourism, agriculture, and more were identified by the REDC as growth opportunities in the local economy and areas on which government and the private sector should focus attention. The two REDC reports are landmark documents that provide sound guidance for all public and private sector partners working to achieve economic growth in the region.

Another important document with which *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* seeks to align is the County’s own, *Initiatives for a Smart Economy*. Released in June 2013, *Initiatives for a Smart Economy* is an economic development plan that discusses ways county government can help support the growth sectors identified by the REDC. Specifically, it contains 64 initiatives and projects across 12 different areas where County Government can influence a positive change in the local economy.⁹

⁹ A complete copy of *Initiatives for a Smart Economy* is available at:
<http://www2.erie.gov/environment/sites/www2.erie.gov.environment/files/uploads/pdfs/SmartEconomy%20for%20Web3.pdf>

Finally it is also important to acknowledge that *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* does not just seek alignment with efforts and plans focused on the regional economy and economic development. It also seeks to align with plans and efforts that comprehensively examine other specific challenges in our community. One such plan is the recently released, *One Region Forward: A New Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara*¹⁰. The concepts and principles supported in *One Region Forward*—principles such as smart land-use planning, affordable housing, multi-modal transportation, energy conservation, and improved food systems—are not specifically focused on the local economy but will definitely make a stronger community. Other such plans include the *County’s 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development*¹¹ and the *County’s 2012 Community Health Assessment*.¹²

As the sections of *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* unfold, the reader should make note of the alignment with concepts and strategies discussed in these other regionally significant documents.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

At its core, *Initiatives for a Stronger Community* recognizes that communities are only as strong as the people who call them home. Strong

¹⁰ A full copy of *One Region Forward: A New Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara* is available at:
http://issuu.com/buffaloarchplan/docs/a_new_way_to_plan_for_buffalo_niagara

¹¹ A full copy of the County’s 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development is at:
http://www2.erie.gov/environment/sites/www2.erie.gov.environment/files/uploads/CDBG_EC2015-2019ConPlan.pdf

¹² A full copy of the County’s 2014-2017 Community Health Assessment is available at:
<http://www2.erie.gov/health/sites/www2.erie.gov.health/files/uploads/pdfs/Erie%20County%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%20Final%201.7.15.docx>

communities are made up of strong people who have what they need to thrive. They not only have job opportunities, they have people who have the skills needed to find, secure, and hold jobs. They not only have school buildings and libraries, they have children and young adults that are fully supported and given every opportunity to succeed. Strong communities promote healthy lifestyles, ensure access to food and housing, and provide high quality health care. Above all else, strong communities are prepared to help those in need.

The plan to follow is divided into four sections that correspond with what County government can do to help build a stronger community and enable residents to thrive. The four sections are:

1. **Employment & Financial Security:** A section dedicated to breaking down the barriers to employment opportunities and financial security, both essential ingredients to creating self-sufficiency.
2. **Strong Families, Strong Schools, Strong Children:** A section which recognizes the challenges our young people are facing and identifies ways to support them and their families, strengthen academic success, and prepare them for growing employment opportunities in our community.
3. **Lifelong Health:** A section that discusses the health challenges many residents are facing (from food security to chronic disease), the threats they pose to self-sufficiency, and finds ways to support both mental and physical wellness.
4. **Help Where and When it is Needed:** A section that acknowledges most people do not need permanent assistance, but rather specific kinds of help for a variety of needs at critical points in their lives. It outlines

several efforts Erie County will undertake to improve access to services for those in need.

Inside each section the reader will find the outcome of a year-long effort to identify initiatives that Erie County government could undertake in the course of a year, which would result in incremental improvements and lead to a stronger community. Participating departments included, but were not limited to, Social Services (ECDSS), Senior Services (ECDSrSv), Health (ECDOH), Mental Health (ECDMH), Probation (ECPD), Environment and Planning (ECDEP), Division of Equal Employment Opportunity (ECEEO), Office of Public Advocacy (ECPA), Office for the Disabled (ECOD), and Veterans Services Agency (ECVSA).

Department Heads, working together and talking with community partners over many months, identified several goals for the health and human services plan, including helping individuals find and keep good paying jobs, partnering with schools to improve the wellbeing of our children, reducing food insecurity among the elderly, and increasing access to services for those with limited English proficiency, to name just a few. The initiatives the participating departments will undertake in the upcoming year are grouped by these larger goals.

Each section begins with an introduction that succinctly states the relevance of that section's focus to strong communities. From there, one will find a short description of the efforts Erie County already has underway before a detailed account of each of the 2015 goals and initiatives is presented. Each initiative identifies the lead department, potential partners, the outcomes of the initiative, and the anticipated impact. Potential partners include non-profit community-based organizations, philanthropic organizations, as well as private and public-sector entities that have been identified by the County as being related in mission and scope to the subject area of a given initiative. Please note that potential partners had not been specifically solicited nor had

they endorsed any action item they are associated with in this document, at the time of its printing. Lead departments will be connecting with these potential partners throughout 2015 as initiative development and implementation unfolds.

Building a stronger community requires ongoing effort. In recognition of that, each section concludes with a look ahead to some developing efforts that will add to the continuing work to strengthen our community in 2016 and beyond.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Initiatives for a Stronger Community is not a plan to solve all the negative societal issues in our community; no one plan can in fact do so. However it represents what compassionate government can do to increase financial security and reduce poverty, hunger, poor health outcomes, and other common problems that communities everywhere face.

Initiatives for a Stronger Community is not a plan to invest millions of new dollars in health and human services. It is a call to do better with the resources already available to participating departments, including their current County funds, as well as existing federal and state grants. As such, the reader will not find grandiose promises to put a “chicken in every pot and a car in every garage.”¹³ Instead, one will find initiatives that reflect low-cost, high impact strategies that can turn the curve on negative trends in our community. Where significant new resources are brought to bear, the source of those resources is included in the initiative description.

By examining challenges in our community and identifying those things County government has the power and capacity to influence—especially when working over many months and in partnership with others—we believe we will see many personal success stories emerge and become a reality. While no one plan will solve the overall issues that threaten the health and well-being of our residents, working together, these initiatives can create the community and societal supports necessary to give all of our residents a chance to succeed and a chance to become a part of our New Buffalo – the New Erie County.

¹³ During the presidential campaign of 1928, a circular claimed that if Herbert Hoover won there would be “a chicken in every pot AND A CAR IN EVERY GARAGE.” Read more: Promising a Chicken in Every Pot
<http://www.infoplease.com/askeds/promising-chicken-every-pot.html#ixzz3To2wXySq>

STRONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Julio Baez Ramos

During the Great Recession, Julio Baez Ramos, a 46-year old married father of two, was laid off. Despite a desire to work, Julio was unable to obtain employment and struggled to provide for his family. Like many residents in need, he came to Erie County to for help. As part of his application for Temporary Assistance, Julio was assigned to the Work Experience Program at the Belle Center. Julio quickly demonstrated that he was conscientious, motivated and job ready, and was assigned to a Department of Social Services Job Developer for job search and placement services. An employability assessment of his skills and education determined the appropriate referrals for employment and training.

Julio became a participant of the Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training Program and was hired at Lorigo's Meating Place as a butcher trainee. After completing training, Julio successfully transitioned into a career as a full-time butcher. Today, Julio is employed and no longer receiving Temporary Assistance. He's self-sufficient, successful and has learned a valuable skilled trade to provide for his family.

Section 1:

Employment & Financial Security

Strong communities help individuals achieve financial security and self-sufficiency through good employment opportunities, affordable housing, and reliable public transportation.

Financial security feels like a long lost dream for far too many residents of our community. Instead of thinking about how much to save for retirement many years down the road, many people, living in and around the edges of poverty, are considering how they will make it to their next pay day. Many factors influence an individual's financial security including their income and access to employment opportunities, their housing and food costs, and the reliability of their transportation.

This section focuses on Erie County's current and future efforts to increase access to employment for underrepresented groups in our community. Specific attention is put on assisting Erie County clients in developing skills and finding work that pays enough to support their families and move to self-sufficiency.

In addition to employment, this section also focuses on financial security by stressing access to affordable housing. The lack of affordable housing contributes to household stress, cost burdens, and continuing segregation of income and ethnic groups within Erie County. This is not a problem unique to the urban communities of our region but is also widespread within the rural populations. Recent Five-Year (2015-19) Consolidated Community Development and Housing Plans prepared by the City of Buffalo, the Erie County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consortium, and the Amherst, Cheektowaga, Tonawanda HOME Consortium identify disturbing statistics. A few are noted below.

- The most common housing problem across Erie County is cost burden, where residents paid more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing costs. Over 49,000 renter occupied households experience this problem on a daily basis, thereby greatly adding to the challenge of achieving financial security.
- The need for additional rental units for low-income families is present. As noted in the City of Buffalo Consolidated Plan, since only 38 percent of rental units within the City have three or more bedrooms and rents increasing, low-income families with children are likely to have a difficult time locating affordable rents.
- The Erie County Consortium document also mirrors the issues with rental family housing noted in the City of Buffalo. Eighty-seven percent of low-income renters are living in substandard units, 74 percent are in overcrowded conditions. The clear trend is that renters and extremely low-income households are much more likely to have housing problems than homeowners and higher income groups.

The Initiatives for addressing employment and financial security build on efforts currently underway by Erie County, which exemplify the strategy of providing training in areas of high demand, supporting employers, collaboration with community partners, and assisting those with barriers to employment. Efforts to be undertaken in the year ahead focus on removing barriers to employment, developing employment opportunities in specific fields with regional employers, ensuring fairness in county contracting and county jobs, and improving access to affordable housing. The County will also begin to explore ways to it can contribute to efforts to improve public transportation, racial

equity and economic inclusion, and lay the foundation for work to be done on this front beyond 2015.

Taken as a whole, all the initiatives included herein, as well as those identified in other regionally significant documents like *Initiatives for a Smart Economy* and the *Strategy for Prosperity*, are meant to decrease poverty, increase opportunity, and help members of our community achieve the financial security necessary to truly become self-sufficient.

EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

IMPLEMENTATION OF INITIATIVES FOR A SMART ECONOMY. As previously indicated, *Initiatives for a Smart Economy* is an economic development plan released by the Poloncarz Administration in June 2013. It aligns with the plans adopted by the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) and contains 64 specific initiatives and projects across 12 different areas where Erie County government can positively influence the local economy.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD. The Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), through the Workforce Development Consortium (WDC) and the One Stop Career Center System, provides job placement and training services to job seekers while implementing initiatives to assist employers in filling their workforce needs. The WIB promotes private sector employer participation in all workforce activities to assist in meeting local hiring needs and to connect workforce investment with local and regional development strategies. The WIB's goal is to work together with representatives from business, labor, community-based organizations, education, human services, economic development and other critical stakeholders to rethink and restructure the way local workforce development services are planned and delivered.

To that end, the WIB hosts the annual Workforce Development Summit Series to gather information on employer priorities and gaps in the workforce. The WIB then uses information gleaned from the Summit Series to create and enhance training that will lead to in-demand jobs in the regional economy. The WIB aims to incorporate its programs in an integrated system of training that includes Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), New York State Department of Labor, Erie Community College (ECC) and Western New York's four year colleges and universities. Training participants are provided information on career ladders and jobs most likely to lead to family-sustaining wages with long term sustainability.

PARTNERSHIP WITH UB/EOC TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS TO SNAP ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as "food stamps," provides nutritional assistance to individuals and families on public assistance. The New York State SNAP Employment and Training Program provides employment and training services for SNAP recipients to help them achieve self-sufficiency by giving them the skills they need to succeed in the labor market. The organization responsible for administering this program in our community is the University at Buffalo Equal Opportunity Center (UB/EOC).

ECDSS partners with UB/EOC to provide employment and training programs to SNAP eligible recipients using an integrated approach to deliver wrap-around services for adult students. The program design includes pre-assessment, career planning, instructional support, educational skills, vocational training programs, work related activities, job preparation, placement and retention, and integration with community services. UB/EOC students are also offered additional services (e.g. limited transportation assistance and job readiness

classes) and other benefits relating to education and employment.

The priority populations are individuals with significant barriers to employment including ex-offenders, those with a history of substance abuse, housing displacements, individuals with limited English proficiency, limited or no work experience and eligible youth between the ages of 17-24, who receive SNAP benefits or Safety Net/SNAP. ECDSS referrals also include youth that are transitioning from the foster care system. There is also a concerted effort to engage parents (including non-custodial) who are unemployed or underemployed.

BUFFALO CENTER FOR ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY. ECDSS is working with Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology to allow its students to meet the regulatory requirements they may have as public assistance recipients, such as scheduling mandatory appointments outside of the training hours. Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology provides adult career education in the areas of Medical Coder and Pharmacy Technician, which are two high demand careers in the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. The nine-month training programs are offered at no cost to participants and include career preparation support and an eight-week internship with the school's partners, including Erie County Medical Center (ECMC), Catholic Health Systems and Kaleida Health. The curriculum leads to employment in careers presently existing in Erie County that provide living wages and long term, sustainable incomes.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS ON PROBATION. Individuals on probation often face barriers preventing them from improving themselves in order to live law-abiding, productive lives. For example, they often lack the skills necessary for good-paying jobs due to limited education and lack of work experience.

ECPD works with community partners to assist individuals gain job skills necessary to remove barriers that prohibit probationers from being self-sufficient. ECPD also has specially trained staff that assists probationers in personal developmental skills in order to prepare probationers to seek and maintain gainful employment.

ECPD has three specific in-house programs: 1. Collaboration with the Center for Employment Opportunities specifically geared towards finding employment for 18-24 year olds; 2. Thinking for a Change; and 3. Ready Set Work. These programs assist probationers to change their criminal way of thinking, gain social skills, manage life conflict, enhance their self-image, facilitate the development of higher stages of moral reasoning and increased social supports, prepare for employment, and retain employment.

PIVOT WAGE SUBSIDY PROGRAM. ECDSS's Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training (PIVOT) Program is a unique wage subsidy program designed to connect the local business community and welfare recipients. It is based on the premise that welfare reform success requires Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients to play an active role and become part of the business community. The goal of the PIVOT program is to provide incentives to employers to hire clients with multiple barriers and those that may need more time for on the job training. PIVOT provides quality job opportunities for the employable TANF population while serving as a resource for the hiring needs of local employers. Job developers match employable TANF clients with companies looking to fill existing positions. All candidates are pre-screened for job compatibility including matching a client's skills, abilities and education with the job specifications. The employer receives a six-month full time wage subsidy in exchange for providing on the job training to the TANF client and agreeing to hire the client as a permanent employee after training has concluded. Employers are able to reduce

hiring and training costs, while TANF clients are able to transition to permanent jobs with family-sustaining wages.

The PIVOT program currently works with over 300 employers in WNY. Since 2000, over 4300 clients have been placed in PIVOT contracts in businesses such as nursing homes, hospitals, banks, hotels, call centers, manufacturing and industrial companies, non-profits and community agencies.

EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE. Childcare costs are recognized as one of the biggest barrier for single parents achieving employment. Put simply, without someone to watch the child, a single parent cannot work. Before Mark C. Poloncarz took office, the child care eligibility was reduced to 175 percent. Single parents earning between 175 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level may have been denied the opportunity to work because they were unable to afford child care as a result of the reduction. In 2012, the Poloncarz administration restored the eligibility rate to 200 percent. This expansion supported approximately 200 additional children each month.

THE YEAR AHEAD

GOAL: *Populations that have historically struggled to find fair-paying employment will have the tools to succeed.*

Maintaining employment in a fair-paying job is essential to financial security and self-sufficiency. Meanwhile many barriers exist and significant support is necessary to help individuals overcome difficulties. The initiatives below are meant to identify barriers for target populations and specify ways to provide critical assistance.

1.1 PIVOT PILOT PROGRAMS WITH THE CHILD CARE RESOURCE NETWORK AND THE AMHERST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

Although many public assistance clients only have a High School Diploma or High School Equivalency and lack work history, they may have the desire and ability to care for children. However, the lack of work history and certification prevents them from obtaining employment in this profession. PIVOT placements in high-quality child care centers will allow these clients to gain the work history and training necessary for future unsubsidized employment.

ECDSS will partner with the Child Care Resource Network (CCRN) in a pilot program to identify and recruit high quality child care centers to participate in PIVOT. The PIVOT placement at a child care center will also help facilitate the participant's ability to receive certification in this profession. Child care center regulations require at least 15 hours of training in the first six months of employment. As an employee of a child care center, the staff may also be eligible for the Education Incentive Program which provides scholarships to obtain a Child Development Associate (CDA) Certificate. A person with a CDA meets the minimum requirement for a teaching position in a Head Start program and other child care programs. The opportunity for on-the-job training and support placement can set clients on a career pathway, not just a job.

ECDSS will also pilot the PIVOT program with the Amherst Chamber of Commerce to increase the number of PIVOT clients placed with employers located outside the City of Buffalo. Employers often report a lack of qualified candidates, and ECDSS reports a lack of employment opportunities that pay significantly above the minimum wage. The initiative will seek to increase the number of ECDSS clients in employment opportunities that lead to a career pathway and ultimately to self-sufficiency. The collaborative will host job fairs, job matching

opportunities, and provide supportive services to help clients maintain gainful employment. The client will have the opportunity to gain a work history, training, and certification depending on the field. If successful, this pilot program can then be used as a prototype throughout the county.

Lead:	ECSSS
Potential Partners:	CCRN, Amherst Chamber of Commerce
Outcome:	Number of PIVOT placements at child care centers and regional based businesses.
Impact:	More Erie County residents on public assistance achieving self-sufficiency.

1.2 STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ERIE COUNTY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (ECIDA) AND EXISTING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM.

The ECIDA induces approximately 30 economic development projects annually, usually involving both construction and permanent jobs. These projects often come to fruition through the pairing of private investment with New York State investment, ECIDA benefits and local municipality support. ECIDA has a unique viewpoint on the pipeline of projects that will be undertaken in Erie County over the next 1 to 2 years.

Erie County is fortunate to have a workforce development agency ready and willing to help businesses grow and prosper in WNY. The One Stop system, which is overseen by the WIB, provides many services to assist local businesses in the recruitment, assessment, training and placement of prospective employees. These activities are orchestrated through five One Stop Service Career Centers conveniently located throughout Buffalo and Erie County. The Centers also work directly with employers to sponsor on-site Breakfast Clubs, Job Fairs and focused recruitment based on industry sector and occupation. The One Stop system’s data/client base includes thousands of potential employees with varied education and experience backgrounds. The WIB also uses local, state and

federal funding to administer a highly successful On-the-Job Training Program which helps subsidize new employees for up to six months and may cover up to 90 percent of full-time wages during this period.

The ECIDA and the WIB have an existing relationship, but neither party is taking full advantage of the opportunities it presents. By increasing the degree of collaboration between the two agencies, both will better be able to serve their clients and help businesses as well as individuals grow and prosper in our community. The ECIDA and the WIB will explore ways to promote the WIB’s range of services to the ECIDA’s clients, including potentially creating a requirement that any project induced by the ECIDA must provide notice of any employment opportunities to the WIB.

Lead:	ECIDA
Potential Partners:	WIB, WDC
Outcome:	Increased number of ECIDA project sponsors participating in WIB programming.
Impact:	Increased employment of qualified local job seekers in high profile economic development projects.

1.3 EDUCATE EMPLOYERS ON THE BENEFITS OF HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

Although the unemployment rate has improved locally, from 8.9 percent in January 2012 to 5.5 percent in December 2014¹⁴, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities remains high at approximately 14 percent. There are many unfounded fears about hiring people with disabilities. However, most people with disabilities are hard workers, dedicated to their jobs, take fewer days off, and are highly productive. Local employers are often not aware that there is a large population of people who want to work but are not provided the opportunity. Erie County will lead the way in making employers aware of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Meanwhile, numerous human service agencies provide employment assistance for individuals with a disability and federal tax incentives are provided to companies that hire people with a disability. Erie County also has a 55-A program. 55-A refers to the section of New York State Civil Law which provides opportunities for job seekers with a qualified disability to apply for a Civil Service job without taking an exam. To support the 55-A program, ECOD has created diversity career fairs at the library in collaboration with Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR).

ECOD will continue its efforts to support individuals with a disability while educating large employers about the benefits of and the available incentives for hiring disabled workers. Erie County will also work internally to develop more 55-A opportunities.

Lead:	ECOD
Potential Partners:	ECCEO, Personnel Department, Buffalo Niagara Partnership, ACCES-VR, WNY Employment Consortium, WNY Independent Living.
Outcomes:	Increased number of 55-A employees in Erie County and increased number of employers hiring disabled individuals.
Impact:	Fewer unemployed disabled individuals in our community.

1.4 DEVELOP EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS RETURNING FROM STATE PRISON.

As background, the Erie County Reentry Task Force (ECRTF) is co-led by ECDMH and the New York State Department of Community Corrections & Community Supervision. ECRTF is made up of community partners whose mission is to promote community support for persons who are released from State prison into the community. ECRTF’s goals include reducing offender recidivism and increasing public safety by developing a local service delivery system to address the crimineogenic (producing or tending to produce crime or criminality) and

stabilization needs of the individuals released from prison.

ECRTF serves moderate to high risk offenders and, in partnership with New York State Parole, ensures referral to essential services in order to keep people from reoffending. Care Management services are provided through a contract with Spectrum Human Services. Care Management focuses on the primary services that prevent reoffending i.e. housing, behavioral health treatment and employment.

In the past year, ECRTF has increasingly seen employment as the most important focus for our community, and is working to increase the number of these individuals with jobs. In 2015, the Reentry Coordinator and ECRTF will do the following:

- Develop a process to expand referrals from the task force into the Steps for Success program at the WDC.
- Initiate discussion to explore new training and employment opportunities in construction and labor fields to take advantage of the new manufacturing and construction jobs that are going unfilled.
- Develop a working relationship with ECC and their Education to Recovery program where training can be provided for construction/labor positions available in the community.
- Continue to explore and develop mentoring options in the community that will focus on employment opportunities as well.

Steady employment increases the likelihood of successful transition back into the community. When individuals are released from the correctional facility, they usually have minimal resources or financial support. Steady employment also decreases the risk of the offender reoffending due to a lack of income. With employment, people will be more likely to stay out of prison. In addition to feeling a sense of accomplishment, achievement and

belonging, they will be able to pay rent and support their families.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, Reentry Task Force, Spectrum Human Services, Center for Employment Opportunities, WDC, ECC, Mental Health Peer Connection
Outcome:	A higher number of individuals returning from State prison through the Reentry Task Force will have jobs.
Impact:	Fewer unemployed, formerly incarcerated individuals in our community.

1.5 ISSUE EXECUTIVE ORDER - REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS BY “BANNING THE BOX.”

Criminal histories keep many people from securing a job for which they are otherwise qualified long after they have paid their debt to society. Nearly one-third of American adults have been arrested by age 23;¹⁵ a criminal record can have lifelong implications for employment and financial security. Reliable employment is an important predictor of successful re-entry and lessens the likelihood of recidivism. Disclosure of a criminal record on a job application reduces the likelihood of a callback or offer of employment by 50 percent; the penalty to people of color is even greater.¹⁶ Many employers have overly-broad policies that screen out anyone with any history of contact with the criminal justice system.

In recent years, momentum for fair hiring policies with respect to criminal histories has grown exponentially. Fourteen states and 100 cities and counties have adopted “Ban the Box” policies requiring employers to consider a job seeker’s

qualifications first, without regard to criminal history. This type of policy gives applicants a fair chance by removing the conviction history question from the application entirely and delaying the background check inquiry until later in the hiring. This kind of policy would not eliminate background checks and would not prohibit employers from asking about convictions during the interview process. It would allow the employer the discretion to hire the most qualified candidate for the job. It would also encourage employers to make individualized assessments instead of blanket exclusions and consider the age of the offence and its relevance to the job.

- In 2013, the City of Buffalo passed legislation removing the conviction question from City of Buffalo employment applications. The ordinance also prohibits any public or private employers located within with City or vendors to the City from including such conviction inquiries on employment applications or asking questions about an applicant’s criminal convictions at any time prior to the first interview.
- As a best practice, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recommends that employers not ask about convictions on job applications, consistent with applicable laws. When conviction inquiries are made, the EEOC recommends that the inquiries be limited to convictions that are directly related to the position applied for and consistent with business necessity.

Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz will issue an Executive Order directing the Erie County Department of Personnel, in conjunction with the ECEEO, to remove any questions regarding an applicant’s prior criminal history from all Erie County preliminary employment applications, except as otherwise required by law.

¹⁵ Barnes, Robert, Michael G. Turner, Raymond Paternoster, and Shawn D. Bushway, “Cumulative Prevalence of Arrest from Ages 8 to 23 in a National Sample,” *Pediatrics* (January 2012): 21-27.

¹⁶ Pager, Devah, “The Mark of a Criminal,” *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (2003): 957-960.

Lead:	County Executive
Potential Partners:	Personnel, Purchasing, ECPD, Central Police Services, ECEEO, Center for Employment Opportunities
Outcome:	More individuals with criminal histories will be considered for open positions based on their skills and qualifications.
Impact:	Increased numbers of ex-offenders securing long term employment.

1.6 CONVENE PAY EQUITY ROUND-

TABLE. More than fifty years after the passage of the Equal Pay Act (EPA), working women continue to suffer the consequences of unequal pay. Women working full time typically earn only 77 percent of what men earn. For African-American women and Latinas, the pay gap is even greater. Data obtained by the 2010 Census reveals that in Erie County, women comprise 52.41 percent of the population and 59.48 percent of the labor force. Yet the median individual income for males in Erie County is \$34,544 vs. female median individual income in Erie County of \$25,226 –reflecting a difference of over \$9,000 per year that men earn more than women. Moreover:

- almost 30 percent of families in Buffalo live in poverty and 63 percent of those families are headed by women; and
- families comprised of one adult, one preschooler and one school-age child need to earn a total yearly income of \$47,262.00 just to meet basic needs.

In order to inform the public about the problem of pay equity, the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women will host and facilitate a roundtable discussion of representatives from various organizations and agencies that represent and/or serve women from different educational, socio-economic and experiential backgrounds in Erie County. The goal of the discussion would be to determine how the issue of pay equity impacts each of these unique cohorts differently with the intention of identifying specific strategies, trainings, and tools that would educate and empower each

group of women to achieve fair job compensation. Information gathered at the discussion will be disseminated to women throughout our community through numerous partnerships.

The Erie County Commission on the Status of Women will also host and facilitate a roundtable discussion of representatives from for profit businesses and not for profit organizations to discuss their approach to abiding to the EPA within their respective organizations. The outcome of the discussion would be to invite organizations to audit their company’s response to the EPA; as well as encourage companies to conduct salary audits to proactively monitor and address gender-based pay differences, as a good business practice. In addition, the Commission on the Status of Women would strive to identify individuals that would serve on a committee as ‘pay equity consultants’ to local organizations that want to review their compensation policies.

Lead:	Erie County Commission on the Status of Women
Potential Partners:	ECDSS, Erie County Workforce Development, the WNY Women’s Foundation, Veterans One-Stop Center, American Association of University Women, Junior League of Buffalo, Women’s Business Center at Canisius, Planned Parenthood WNY
Outcome:	Business informed about the impact of pay equity on women employees and encouraged to develop strategies and best practices for improvement.
Impact:	Improve women’s earnings and reduce the gender gap earnings.

GOAL: *Erie County will ensure fairness in county contracts and equal access to county jobs*

Each year, County government contracts with hundreds of firms and not-for-profit agencies for a wide variety of services. These contracts are worth millions of dollars and support the employment of thousands of people. Simply put, County government wishes to ensure that all contractors pay employees fairly. Similarly, County government is itself a large employer. While the civil service system exists to help ensure pay equity without regard to race, sex, ability, and more, it is likewise important to ensure that equal access to county jobs exists. The initiatives below are meant to address fairness in county contracts and equal access to county jobs.

1.7 IMPLEMENT EXECUTIVE ORDER #13: PAY EQUITY CERTIFICATION ON COUNTY CONTRACTS.

In 2013, among full-time, year-round workers in the United States, Caucasian women were paid 77 percent of what men were paid for similar work in nearly every occupation, while the disparity is even greater for minorities as African-American women earn 64 cents and Latina women earn 56 cents for every dollar earned by a Caucasian man. Women comprise 52 percent of Erie County's total population, 48.7 percent of its labor force, 61 percent of senior citizens, and 54 percent of the county's registered voters. In Erie County, median weekly earnings for a woman working full-time are \$638.00, while a man doing similar work earns \$798.00.

In order to help reduce this gap, in October 2014, Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz issued Executive Order No. 13: Pay Equity Certification on County Contracts. Contractors with Erie County are now required to submit an Erie County Equal Pay

Certification indicating their compliance with federal and state Equal Pay Laws prior to entering into a contract with Erie County and subjecting said contractors to future monitoring and audits of contractor records to confirm compliance with Equal Pay Laws. Throughout 2015, the ECEEO will work to establish a procedure for compliance monitoring and periodic auditing of certification records.

Lead:	ECEEO
Potential Partners:	Erie County Attorney's Office, Division of Purchase, and all County Departments
Outcome:	Policies and Procedures to Implement Executive Order
Impact:	Equal Pay enforced in Erie County

1.8 ISSUE EXECUTIVE ORDER EXPANDING CIVIL SERVICE OUTREACH TO INCLUDE A BROADER POPULATION.

Erie County government's workforce consists of over 4,000 people, the vast majority of whom are civil servants. The Civil Service structure was originally established in 1883 to ensure that individuals working in the government were hired based on merit and fitness for a specific post rather than political favor. Given this, it is essential that the widest possible diversity of people take the exams as a method to obtain access to County job opportunities. Without expanded outreach, Erie County government risks missing a strategic opportunity to leverage our greatest human resources in this community and recruit from among the full spectrum of the County's labor market.

To address this issue, Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz will issue an Executive Order directing the Erie County Department of Personnel, in conjunction with the Division of Equal Employment Opportunity, to expand outreach efforts on civil service exams to include typically under-represented groups including (but not limited to) minorities, veterans, people with disabilities, and immigrants. In order to identify how

and where to best focus outreach efforts, the Erie County Personnel Department, together with ECEEO, will convene a working group of knowledgeable stakeholders able to assist the County with its efforts. The working group will review voluntary reporting data captured by New York State at the time of the exam and other relevant labor market data for Erie County. This data will help identify under-represented groups and will sharpen the focus of outreach efforts. The working group will also consider the benefits of civil service test preparation classes for all residents, including the constituencies targeted by outreach efforts.

Lead:	Department of Personnel and ECEEO
Potential Partners:	ECDSS, ECPA, ECVSA, ECOD, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County (UWBEC), People Inc., Amvet Posts, Buffalo Erie County Public Libraries (BECPL), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
Outcome:	A wider diversity of individuals will take the civil service exam
Impact:	Diversifying of the talent pool from which Erie County will hire and diversifying the county workforce.

GOAL: *Erie Count will increase financial security and reduce poverty by supporting access to affordable housing.*

As previously noted, even when employment is stable, the financial security of most households is severely threatened if proper housing is not provided in a manner that is both affordable and safe. Sadly, many households within Erie County, especially low-income families with children, experience severe housing cost burdens and have difficulty finding affordable units that can accommodate their needs. Unfortunately, Erie County is limited in its ability to develop housing directly. However, through the County’s role as administrator of the Erie County Consortium CDBG Program certain initiatives will be undertaken.

1.9 RENTAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

ECDEP will double the set aside within the CDBG Budget in 2015, 2016, and 2017 for the Rental Rehab Program to approximately \$300,000 annually. This may increase the number of rental units assisted during the three year period to approximately 96 total units.

Lead:	ECDEP
Potential Partners:	Erie County CDBG Consortium, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
Outcome:	Number of rental units rehabilitated.
Impact:	Increased numbers of affordable rental housing units to low and moderate income individuals and families.

1.10 NEW RENTAL HOUSING INCENTIVE PROGRAM.

Approximately \$100,000 in Federal HOME Investment Partnership funds will be set aside in the ECDEP’s Annual Action Plan budget for 2015, 2016, and 2017. Although seemingly small, these dollars serve as a source of local matching money and help to leverage millions more. Nonprofit developers will use this money when applying for state and federal affordable housing dollars, making their projects more competitive. Priority will be given to family rental housing.

Lead:	ECDEP
Potential Partners:	Erie County HOME Consortium, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
Outcome:	Increased availability of affordable family rental housing.
Impact:	Leverage over \$3,000,000 in other federal and state resources for new affordable family rental units. This would result in construction of over 60 new units during the three year period.

1.11 ERIE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING LAW.

ECDEP and Department of Law will analyze the merits of enacting a new Countywide Fair Housing Law. Housing discrimination due to many factors ranging from lawful source of income to family type would be important components of the law. Access

to fair housing opportunities is a critical need for families struggling to eliminate all constraints to their financial security.

Lead:	ECDEP
Potential Partners:	Department of Law, ECOD, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, County Legislature
Outcome:	Increased access to housing without risk of unlawful discrimination.
Impact:	A more informed public concerning housing discrimination and the various tools available to address the issue

GOAL: *Erie County will strengthen the capacity of the community and government to help reduce poverty.*

1.12 RE-ESTABLISH THE WELFARE ADVISORY BOARD AS A POVERTY COMMITTEE. There are numerous groups in Erie County working formally and informally to reduce poverty. Although Erie County regularly partners with these groups, there is not currently a formal mechanism to solicit their input. Previously, pursuant to Erie County’s Charter, a Welfare Advisory Board was empaneled which advised County leadership on management of its public assistance programs. Though it has been many years since the Welfare Advisory Board has been active, Erie County’s Charter provides in part, “The welfare advisory board shall at the request of the commissioner, and may on its own initiative, advise on matters relating to the operation and improvement of the department or involving social welfare.” The Charter directs the board be made up of seven members appointed by the County Executive.

The County Executive will re-establish the Welfare Advisory Board and charge it with advising Erie County on how to reduce poverty. In addition to alleviating the effects of poverty, the Board will work

with all health and human service departments so it can work to reduce its sources as well, including the lack of job opportunities, the high costs of housing, substance abuse, mental illness, discrimination, and disability. A staff position will be created to support the work of this board, as well as the Erie County Community Coordinating Council on Children and Families.

Lead:	Office of the Erie County Executive
Potential Partners:	Various Erie County Departments, Erie County Community Coordinating Council on Children and Families
Outcome:	Increased community input in decision making concerning poverty
Impact:	Gradual decline of prevalence of poverty in our community

BEYOND 2015

INNOVATE WAYS TO MEET REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CLIENTS SEEKING TO ENHANCE THEIR EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL. Recipients of public assistance programs must comply with numerous state and federal mandates enforced by ECDSS in order to continue receiving their assistance. Although these requirements encourage self-sufficiency and discourage abuse, they can sometimes serve as a barrier to individuals trying to improve themselves. Individuals on public assistance often lack the skills necessary for good-paying jobs and are unable to take advantage of opportunities to gain those skills because it interferes with their public assistance requirements. Through identified partnerships, ECDSS will work cooperatively with organizations to enhance strategies and services, and provide linkages that offer job-training and vocational rehabilitation programming with agencies.

IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES IDENTIFIED IN THE ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE.

ECDEP has engaged a consultant to study the region's impediments to fair housing. The work of the consultant is nearly complete and ECDEP will soon issue a document with the results of the study. The document will identify a series of actions that Erie County can carry out to help remove barriers low-income families face when seeking affordable housing. These actions will be reviewed by ECDEP in 2015, and their implementation started in 2016.

EXPLORE COUNTY ROLE IN SUPPORTING GREATER ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.

Erie County is required to give a portion of the sales tax to the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). Nearly \$20 million of sales tax revenue is budgeted for the NFTA in 2015. The County will also pass on to the NFTA another \$3.6 million of NYS revenue. In addition, both the County Executive and the County Legislature each recommend an NFTA Board appointment to the Governor. Clearly, Erie County is an important stakeholder in the work and governance of the NFTA. Meanwhile, the NFTA continues to experience severe financial challenges. These challenges have resulted in a vicious cycle of increased fares, declining ridership, and decreased routes. People who then rely on public transportation to get to and from work experience longer commute times. The inability to access affordable, reliable, public transportation causes further stress on an individual's ability to maintain employment and achieve financial security.

Through the ECIDA, the County may be able to play a greater role in ensuring people have direct routes to and from work. Beyond 2015, the County will study the role of transportation in the decision making processes of the ECIDA and the interplay between economic development decisions and the growth or

decline of public transportation. The County can then propose recommended changes to ECIDA policy if needed. The County will use its own *Framework for Regional Growth* and the recently adopted *One Region Forward* plan as resources when conducting its analysis. This way, the County can ensure ECIDA policies are consistent with smart growth principles and development projects occurring on major transportation lines receive the incentives they deserve.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE RACIAL EQUITY ROUNDTABLE.

Convened by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, the Racial Equity Roundtable is a task force of diverse leaders from the public, private, non-profit, philanthropic, and faith-based sectors committed to "advancing racial equity in the Greater Buffalo region." The roundtable met in March 2015 to review the process it will undertake and hear presentations by the Cleveland Commission on Economic Inclusion, which has been working on racial equity issues in Cleveland, Ohio for the past 14 years.

During the course of 2015, the Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable will hire consultants to: 1) facilitate a planning process to advance racial equity in the region; and 2) to generate a report on racial equity indicators, including economic projections. In 2016, the Roundtable will begin implementation of strategies identified in 2015. Erie County is pleased to join with other stakeholders in the leadership of the Roundtable and will play an active role as the work of the Roundtable unfolds. The work of the Roundtable is essential if the economic prospects of the "New Buffalo and New Erie County," are to truly translate into financial security and self-sufficiency for all.

SECTION 1 CONCLUSION

Training opportunities, job development, increased access to employment, removal of barriers, pay equity, affordable housing, public transportation, racial equity, and economic inclusion are critical to helping residents in our community achieve career pathways and experience financial security. Gainful and stable employment gives people the opportunity to either maintain or enhance their standard of living. Access creates opportunities for those historically denied opportunities, including women and minorities, persons with disabilities, veterans, and those who have been previously incarcerated. The initiatives outlined above represent ways Erie County government can lead and influence improved outcomes in people's lives. When executed in collaboration with our partners and in connection with the REDC's *Strategy for Prosperity* and the County's own *Initiatives for a Smart Economy*, these initiatives will help to grow employment opportunities and solidify financial security for the residents of Erie County.

STRONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Elvira and Calvin Northington

Elvira and Calvin Northington live in north Buffalo in a large, well-maintained home. They have been Foster Parents with the Erie County Department of Social Services for nearly twenty years.

When a nephew first needed a home and a family, Elvira and Calvin stepped up and provided him the stability he needed. In that process, they learned of the needs of many other Erie County children for a temporary foster home to allow children to have “parents” while their birth parents worked to regain their stability. Since then, Elvira and Calvin have provided a certified Foster Home both to over 45 Erie County children, adopting five. The Northington family has raised three birth children, their nephew, and the five children they adopted. Elvira quickly adds that she already has 11 grandchildren and her loving just continues.

Elvira Northington is a center figure in the Foster Care Advisory Group that Erie County uses to support its foster parents. She is the energy behind the annual Holiday Party for all Erie County’s foster families and foster children, serving and hosting hundreds of attendees of all ages. Elvira is used as a trainer for potential foster parents that must complete a curriculum before they can be certified. She is the person to whom Erie County refers a foster parent needing support or guidance in the realities of everyday life that is only more complex for foster families.

Section 2: Strong Families, Strong Schools, Strong Children

A strong community sustains itself by investing in its families, schools and children.

Many children in our community face challenging circumstances which, as numerous statistics indicate, threaten their opportunity for future success. However, a strong community refuses to stand idly by and watch this potential lost. Rather, it uses its strengths to help every child grow into a happy, productive adult. Our community is strengthened every time a child reaches adulthood ready to succeed.

It has been often said that it takes a village to raise a child. In that context, a strong community best exercises its strength when guiding a child toward adulthood in the following ways:

- The strength of a school to prepare the child for future success, no matter the struggles the child walks into the classroom with.
- The strength of a child or adolescent to be resilient and adaptive in the face of adversity.
- The strength of a family to model appropriate behavior, even when dealing with personal difficulties.

Our community must strengthen all three in order for children, and thus our community, to be successful.

A strong community seamlessly integrates services for children and their families so they can reach their potential. Schools present the best opportunity a community has to improve outcomes for children. As various reform efforts attempt to improve academic achievement, Erie County has focused its efforts on

addressing other, non-academic needs of students which impedes their ability to be successful. Initiatives which bolster the partnership between Erie County and the education system allow the needs of students be met without requiring the family to navigate a complex series of portals to get children necessary assistance.

Erie County is also a key stakeholder in the juvenile justice system. Although juveniles who commit criminal offenses must face consequences for their actions, a strong community recognizes juveniles are fundamentally and developmentally different from adults. A strong community is able to establish a juvenile justice system which rehabilitates youthful offenders and stops the pipeline to prison many face. It develops strength within every child to grow into a productive adult.

The vast majority of families in every part of Erie County do a good job of raising their children. However, even the best-intentioned parent or caregiver struggles if they lack adequate resources and/or face additional challenges in their lives. Other times, there is an individual with ill intentions responsible for a child who purposefully harms them. Whatever the reason, if children are not guided by a supportive family, they are less likely to grow into successful adults. Erie County has a tremendous opportunity to bolster struggling families through its various child welfare programs. Several tragic deaths of young children have underscored the importance of Child Protective Services (CPS). Erie County has been tremendously focused on improving this critical program. Current and future initiatives will strengthen CPS, and other child welfare programs. Doing so will improve Erie County's ability to assist families with needs.

Finally, recent census estimates indicate the majority of City of Buffalo children live below the federal poverty level.¹⁷ Childhood poverty is correlated with

¹⁷ US Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey

low academic achievement, teenage pregnancy and childbearing, poor mental and physical health, delinquent behavior, and unemployment in early adulthood.¹⁸ These negative outcomes have a societal cost as these individuals tend to use more government resources throughout their lives. The consequences of allowing these negative outcomes to continue to materialize will undermine our community's revitalization. Current and future initiatives aim to support families, their children and their schools to curb some of these negative trends.

- Stationed CPS employees at two City of Buffalo hospitals with the highest number of CPS reports to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect that originate from those facilities, providing hospital staff faster access to CPS expertise while streamlining and expediting the investigation process.
- Created a new job title, Protective Service Investigator, filled by individuals with law enforcement experience, to liaison with law enforcement agencies during a CPS investigation.

EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

“SAY YES” PILOT OF SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS. In collaboration with local Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers, Planned Parenthood of WNY, Buffalo Public Schools (BPS), and Say Yes to Education, ECDOH is creating mobile health centers to provide primary healthcare services at Buffalo schools. Services include contraceptives counseling and dispensing, age-appropriate health screenings, immunizations, sexually transmitted disease screenings and education.

IMPROVED CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CPS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS. Erie County's CPS have undertaken steps to better connect CPS with other interested stakeholders. ECDSS has:

- Contracted with Child and Family Services, whose programs include the domestic violence shelter, Haven House, to provide two trained domestic violence advocates to assist with CPS investigations when additional family violence is suspected.

ERIE COUNTY COMMUNITY COORDINATING COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

In May 2014, the Erie County Legislature approved a local law to strengthen the Erie County Community Coordinating Council on Children and Families. These changes allow the Council to bring community stakeholders together to coordinate efforts to improve child wellbeing. A shared agenda amongst stakeholders is being created from a common vision for change. This will allow our community to develop mutually enforcing activities to improve the lives of children. Other communities that have invested in coordination of child and family services have experienced a reduced need for foster care, increased graduation rates and reduce reports of abuse and neglect. Erie County is committed to replicating that approach for this community.

Representatives from ECDSS, ECDOH, ECDMH and ECPD, and the ECOD serve on the Council, as well as fifteen appointees of the County Executive. Erie County will support the efforts of the Council to increase coordination of child and family programs in our community.

¹⁸ Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan (1997) "The Effects of Poverty on Children" The Future of Children

EMPLOY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRINCIPLES AND MEDIATION CONFERENCES AT THE JUVENILE DELINQUENT INTAKE LEVEL TO RESOLVE APPEARANCE TICKETS ISSUES. Alleged juvenile delinquents issued a Family Court Appearance Ticket and crime victims have the opportunity to resolve the dispute by participating in a mutually agreed upon Restorative Justice Conference. The primary aim of the Restorative Justice Conference is to repair the harm incurred by the crime victim, while holding the perpetrator accountable. An amicable non-judicial resolution prevents the youth from penetrating deeper into the juvenile justice system.

ECPD works cooperatively with a community group to coordinate conduct and facilitate the Restorative Justice Conference where the offender, the victim, community members, friends/family of the offender and of the victim, and facilitators gather to resolve the incident. The expected outcome of the conference is a mutual agreement between the victim and the offender wherein the harm by the offender is repaired to the crime victim's satisfaction. Following the agreement, the offender is monitored by ECPD and the Restorative Justice Facilitator to ensure compliance with the agreement and ultimately to determine if the case can be adjusted without judicial intervention.

COUNCIL FOR BOYS AND YOUNG MEN. ECPD, in conjunction with the City of Buffalo Division of Youth, provides programming to high-risk young men involved with the juvenile justice system between 14-16 years old through a Council for Boys and Young Men. The Council for Boys and Young Men is a strengths-based program employing a group approach format to promote the safe and healthy passage through adolescence for males, while emphasizing healthy behavior as a deterrent to prevent further juvenile justice system penetration. The Council meets a core developmental need in

boys for strong, positive relationships while helping them to develop self-efficacy and work on conflict resolutions skills while addressing individual risk factors and enhancement of protective factors.

ECPD and Buffalo Division of Youth provide a trained facilitator and other personnel for the Council for Boys and Young Men sessions. In this structured environment, boys and young men gain the vital opportunity to address masculine definitions and behaviors and build their capacities to find their innate values, create good lives and avoid future contact with the juvenile and criminal justice system.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Erie County operates numerous programs to support children and families in need. In addition, there are a number of systems and organizations that also assist children and families, some in partnership with Erie County and some without. Although Erie County can and must continue to improve the work it performs to improve child outcomes, the best opportunities it has to improve child outcomes is through enhance the relationships it has with the many stakeholders within the community. Community partnerships will allow Erie County to focus on its strengths while utilizing the strengths of its partners, resulting in a better future for our children.

Goal: *Erie County will work cooperatively with the education system to help children be successful.*

Say Yes to Education has brought tremendous excitement and energy to the BPS system. In addition to scholarships, Say Yes to Education has been working with Erie County to address outside barriers to academic achievement. Erie County will continue to work with Say Yes to Education and other partners in the education system to improve

academic achievement of students in our community.

2.1 EXPAND PARTNERSHIP WITH SAY YES TO EDUCATION TO ENHANCE CHILD WELL-BEING FOR BUFFALO SUTDENTS.

Say Yes to Education is a collaboration that brings BPS together with Erie County and other community organizations to organize people, time, money and resources to provide comprehensive, year-round support to BPS students through during K-12 years and beyond. Say Yes to Education provides comprehensive supports, including locally funded tuition scholarships, to more than 125 colleges and universities for those who meet residency, graduation and admission requirements. More than 2,000 students have taken advantage of this tuition scholarship over the past two years. Say Yes to Education is the catalyst for bringing needed child welfare and mental health services into Buffalo schools as they seek to align all school and community providers for child well-being and success.

In 2013, a new partnership between Erie County and Say Yes to Education began to expand in-school supports and services for students in Buffalo schools. A Family Support Specialist was placed in 14 schools to provide support to students, parents, teachers and administrators in addressing barriers to student achievement and well-being by first identifying the child welfare barriers and then connecting students with services to overcome them. This partnership has since expanded to 28 schools. Each Family Support Specialist is required to carry a caseload of students who are identified as at-risk for child welfare or juvenile justice due to chronically poor school attendance or gaps in family engagement needed for their well-being. This strengthens Erie County's ability to protect and serve at-risk children and youth. It provides an opportunity to work with children and service providers to connect students

with needs to the services they need to be safe in their families and academically successful.

Erie County will expand its partnership with Say Yes to Education to provide Family Support Specialists to all BPS buildings. This partnership is expected to reduce the number of child welfare referrals and number of youth entering the juvenile justice system.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	BPS, Say Yes to Education, Catholic Charities
Outcomes:	Number of schools with a Family Support Specialist.
Impact:	Fewer children entering child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems.

2.2 EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC SATELLITES IN BUFFALO SCHOOLS.

As part of a coordinated community response to address the needs of BPS students, a goal to have Outpatient Mental Health Treatment services in school buildings was established. Providing on-site access for such services is viewed as a means to coordinate care for youth and families who may be facing multiple challenges that can negatively impact academic performance. Access to such services in the school can help with facilitating access to care and engagement. In many cases, the School Mental Health Clinic provider is a resource that can be provided to identified youth and their families.

Mental Health Outpatient Satellite Clinics are licensed by the New York State Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH) to provide mental health services to youth with a mental health diagnosis. Access to these services are available to youth that are identified by school personnel, family members or a community stakeholder who, with the families signed consent, may make a referral for services. Clinic services are typically provided during the school day and coordinated with staff to ensure minimal disruption to classroom time.

Implementation of this service in schools was coordinated among several community partners including, but not limited to, Say Yes to Education, BPS, ECDSS and ECDMH, Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, John R. Oishei Foundation, Kaleida Health, and the provider community. The initial selection of the first cohort of schools was driven by the availability of a Family Support Specialist in the building, school readiness/need, and provider match. At the end of 2014, eighteen BPS locations had a mental health clinic satellite operating or near implementation.

In 2015, the stakeholder group will continue to work to identify a second phase of implementation, review data collection procedures, continue to dialogue and resolve challenges and share best practices.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	Say Yes to Education, BPS, ECDSS, ECDOH, Treatment Agencies, NYSOMH, Foundations
Outcomes:	Number of clinic satellites in Buffalo schools will be increased.
Impact:	Children and families will receive the treatment services that they need.

2.3 STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CPS AND SCHOOLS WHEN EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT IS SUSPECTED.

Erie County CPS has a duty to investigate allegations of abuse and maltreatment, including failure to supply the child with adequate education. The central purpose of child protective investigations into allegations of educational neglect is to determine whether absence from school is a symptom of abuse or serious neglect that threatens the child’s safety. While occasionally there is a discovery of more serious concerns to a child’s safety, there is more often a discovery of other issues which the child protective system is not well equipped to address, including complex educational needs, conflict between parents and teens, and

mental illness. Many of these issues are often better addressed by local schools.

ECDSS believes it is in the best interest of the children to collaborate to improve the child’s welfare. The formal and informal practices and procedures to make a report to the statewide central register for child abuse and maltreatment vary between school districts. ECDSS and local school districts will meet to identify common ground – the essential elements that should be evident in school and local department of social services policies and procedures. It is important to recognize that from the process of reporting, which is primarily a school-based responsibility, and throughout the process of investigation, which is the purview of CPS, there will be numerous opportunities for timely intervention involving students, parents, school officials and CPS staff. This collaboration will leverage the strengths of all stakeholders, resulting in better outcomes for children. This collaborative approach may reduce the need for Family Court referral and action.

Erie County will invite and encourage all school districts to identify at least one representative to participate as a liaison to ECDSS to be the conduit for questions and information regarding the reporting and investigation of child abuse and neglect. ECDSS and school districts can begin to explore the development of uniform countywide policies and procedures on the reporting and investigation for child abuse and neglect issues. These policies would include the role and responsibilities of ECDSS and each respective school district.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	ECDOH, Erie 1 BOCES, Erie 2 BOCES, BPS, UWBEC
Outcomes:	Agreements with school districts
Impact:	Increased percentage of CPS reports made by school districts determined to be founded.

2.4 UNIVERSAL DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.

Help Me Grow WNY's mission is to promote the optimal development of our community's young children by providing universal early childhood screenings as a first step in:

- linking families to information and community resources related to child development and parenting;
- providing personalized care coordination; and
- creating and facilitating partnerships within the community to improve the availability and quality of services for families.

Developmental screenings can assist parents, child care providers, medical professionals, and service agencies in meeting the needs of children. Parents and providers use the information gained from screenings to structure learning opportunities and support the development of the child. The initiative seeks to connect young children at risk of developmental or behavioral problems with existing services in the community.

Currently, only a fraction of our local infant and toddler population receives screenings or services for developmental or emotional disabilities; a large percentage of children who need further attention go undetected. Although 10-13 percent of children under the age of three are affected by developmental delays, Early Intervention generally serves only 2-3 percent of children in that age group. In fact, the majority of children eventually identified as having developmental concerns are not identified before they enter school, at which point they are likely to have already fallen behind their peers. Research has shown that there is a higher prevalence of developmental delays and disabilities, and a lower rate of early detection, among low-income children.

ECDSS will partner with Help Me Grow WNY, managed by CCRN and funded by the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York, to assist in the training of contracted child care providers in administration and interpretation of a widely used, evidence-based developmental assessment tool, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, which is used to support early detection and intervention. ECDSS will be instrumental in working to systemize early screenings for all children across Erie County through a collaborative approach to assuring that children entering school are ready to learn and succeed, regardless of their life circumstances.

Lead:	ECDSS, CCRN
Potential Partners:	Early childhood providers, ECDOH, Health Foundation for Western & Central New York, UWBECC, Early Childhood Direction Center, 2-1-1 WNY, Early Intervention, medical organizations, and community-based health and human service providers
Outcomes:	Increased number of children will be screened for developmental or emotional delays and referred to services. The community will have a centralized source for early childhood developmental screenings, data tracking, service referrals, and needs analysis.
Impact:	More children will experience cradle-to-career success.

Goal: *Children Involved in the juvenile justice system will make good choices and the pipeline to prison will be disrupted.*

Erie County is a key stakeholder in the juvenile justice system. In 2015, Erie County will work towards increasing the capacity of the system to treat those most likely to have negative outcomes. The goal will be to prevent deeper penetration into the juvenile justice system and disrupt the pipeline to prison.

2.5 REDUCE PLACEMENTS IN DETENTION AND TREATMENT FACILITIES THROUGH AN INTENSIVE COMMUNITY ASSET PROGRAM (ICAP).

ECDSS will be utilizing an opportunity provided to it by New York State's Pay for Success initiative. Pay for Success projects are public-private partnerships where the State sets performance goals and private and philanthropic investors provide the funds for the program. The State repays investors based on the program's performance, and only makes payments if the goals are achieved following a rigorous independent evaluation. No county funds are necessary.

There exists a distinct cohort of high-risk youth involved in the juvenile justice system for which no current community-based diversion option is seen to be credible. ICAP is designed to serve this high-risk youth population and reduce the likelihood of lengthy and expensive placements in detention and treatment facilities. The ICAP model includes a range of services delivered through existing neighborhood programs which directly address the leading precursors to placement in a costly state facility.

ICAP is designed to serve high-risk youth who are at least ten years old and are involved in the juvenile justice system. The model includes:

- Proactive "place-based" supports, delivered through a neighborhood based Community Asset Navigator;
- Specialized "place-based" services to address key risk factors for ongoing detention and placement by delivering services not currently available or accessible in the neighborhood;
- 24/7 crisis support for participating young people and their families; and
- Service coordination by a case manager between Probation Officers, the Community

Asset Navigator, specialized advocacy/support providers, and Family Court Judges.

Lead:	ECDSS, ECPD
Potential Partners:	Hillside Family of Agencies, Third Sector Capital
Outcome:	Number of youths participating in ICAP
Impact:	Fewer youth requiring lengthy and expensive placements in detention and treatment facilities.

2.6 PUBLISH ANNUAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS.

Erie County partners with many community-based agencies which provide services to youth at risk for entering the juvenile justice system and thus being removed from their home, school or community. Currently there is not a directory of available programs that serve this population. If Erie County Youth Services, community-based organizations or Family Court had easy access to this information, they would be equipped to deploy the best available resource to serve the youth and family. Erie County will create and publish the Community Resource Guide for Youth Programs annually which includes information about available programs, eligibility criteria and entry processes.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	ECDMH and ECDP, Family Court and Voluntary Agencies
Outcome:	Resource Guide.
Impact:	More youth utilizing services at community-based agencies.

Goal: *Children will be supported by families capable of raising children into happy, healthy, productive adults.*

In 2015, Erie County will continue to focus on improving its child protective response. Since CPS is the primary entry point for child welfare programs, it is critical that it be strong. The goal of ECDSS will

always be the safety of the child and giving them the best chance to be successful in life.

2.7 COLLABORATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE KINSHIP PROCESS.

Kinship care is legal custody of a child (or children) who would otherwise likely go into foster care by a relative or someone who has a significant bond with the child. The kin accepts responsibility for care and nurturing of the child while the Family Court system works towards family reunification. Kinship care is the preferred option, whether voluntary or by court order, as it allows children to be with people they know, reducing the trauma of the separation. Kinship care creates a unique set of issues for the caregiver due to the need for resources and support services to manage this added responsibility. Kin accepting the new role may need access to medical care, day care services and financial assistance while they are responsible for food, clothing and shelter for the child or children, while also maintaining relationships with the children's parents and navigating this presumed temporary arrangement.

Erie County has approximately 250 kinship families at any point in time. ECDSS will work to improve support to kinship caregivers, collaborating with families, agencies, Family Court and attorneys to children and parents to identify, approve and support kin in their new role. ECDSS will have a Memorandum of Understanding in place in 2015 that enhances the Kinship track in Erie County with clear responsibilities for practice and accountability for each of ECDSS, Family Court, voluntary agencies, and attorneys for children and parents.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	Family Court, Voluntary Agencies, Casey Family Programs and Attorneys for Children and Parents
Outcome:	Agreement with stakeholders.
Impact:	Improved experience for children and adults involved in the kin process.

2.8 LOBBY NEW YORK STATE FOR CPS REFORM.

In April 2014, County Executive Mark Poloncarz presented a memorandum to members of the Erie County Delegation to the New York State Legislature with 19 recommendations for statutory changes that would improve safety of children. Although none of the Erie County bills passed as initially presented, nearly every bill was introduced in at least one house of the Legislature. This legislation was written after witnessing many bills introduced which, if enacted, would have made it difficult for Erie County to keep children safe.

Rarely does a day go by in NYS when the media does not report a bad outcome for a child. In response, members of the State Legislature have held a series of roundtables to discuss child welfare. Representatives from Erie County have participated in these roundtables, bringing the perspective of an agency responsible for administering many child welfare programs, including CPS. Erie County will continue to press for statewide reforms, including its set of 19 bills.

Lead:	Office of the Erie County Executive
Potential Partners:	New York Public Welfare Association and New York State Association of Counties
Outcome:	Approved legislation.
Impact:	An improved child welfare system in New York State.

2.9 CO-LOCATE A MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR AND A CERTIFIED ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE COUNSELER (CASAC) IN CPS.

Parents suffering mental illness and/or a substance abuse disorders are more likely to abuse and/or neglect their child. By impairing their judgment and priorities, mental illness and substance abuse can affect the way people live, including how they function, interact with others, or parent their children. However, with the mental illness appropriately treated and/or no longer

abusing substances, they are more likely to be successful parents.

A CPS worker may suspect mental illness and/or substance abuse when investigating an allegation of child abuse or neglect. In order for CPS workers to be successful assisting families where mental illness or substance abuse is present, they need access to quick and effective screening, assessment, and treatment. ECDMH and ECDSS will collaborate to co-locate within CPS a mental health counselor and a CASAC. Through collaborative work, each professional discipline draws on the resources and expertise of the other to better respond to the needs of the family. No new funding is required for this initiative and a funding request has been sent to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services.

Lead:	ECDMH and ECDSS
Potential Partners:	Mid-Erie Counseling and Treatment Services, New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Outcome:	Number of individuals screened for mental illness and/or substance abuse issues.
Impact:	Fewer caregivers of children with untreated illness and/or substance abuse issues.

2.10 COMPLETE CHRONIC NEGLECT STUDY AND INCORPORATE FINDINGS INTO CHILD WELFARE RESPONSE.

Experts view chronic neglect as one of the most daunting challenges to the well-being of children who come to the attention of the child welfare system. Behaviors associated with chronic neglect include delays in getting needed medical care, failure to get a child to school, lack of adequate supervision, and inadequate attention to health and nutrition. The accumulation of harm experienced by children suffering chronic neglect has long-term negative effects on the child’s ability to become a healthy adult. Children who suffer chronic neglect often develop emotional and social problems as they get older.

In the 2014 budget, the Erie County Legislature appropriated \$25,000 to fund a study of chronic neglect within Erie County. An audit in 2013 showed that of the cases open in September of that year, 72 percent had previous reports registered in the past four years, including 24 percent with five or more previous reports. After a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) process, the University at Buffalo School of Social Work was selected to conduct this unprecedented study. The study is expected to be completed in 2015 and Erie County will immediately work to incorporate its recommendations for improvements in child welfare practice and ultimately improve outcomes for these children.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	UB School of Social Work
Outcome:	Report on Chronic Neglect
Impact:	Decrease the recidivism rate for those families that have had five or more reports to the statewide central register for child abuse and neglect.

2.11 DEVELOP AND DELIVER AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TO TEACH CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES HOW TO HAVE “HEALTHY FAMILIES AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.”

Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime. Teens often think some behaviors, like teasing and name calling, are a “normal” part of a relationship. However, these behaviors can become abusive and develop into more serious forms of violence.

Specifically, dating violence can have a negative effect on health throughout life. Youth who are victims are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, engage in unhealthy behaviors, like using tobacco, drugs, and alcohol, or exhibit antisocial behaviors and think about suicide. Youth who are victims of dating violence in high school are at higher risk for victimization during college.

ECPA will utilize an educational curriculum to teach middle school students in grades 6 through 8 about healthy relationships. The ultimate goal is to stop dating violence before it starts. During the preteen and teen years, young people are learning skills they need to form positive relationships with others. This is an ideal time to promote healthy relationships and prevent patterns of dating violence that can last into adulthood.

Lead:	ECPA
Potential Partners:	ECDSS, Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence, Child & Family Services, Crisis Services, Family Justice Center and Hispanics United.
Resources:	\$10,000 to develop curriculum
Outcome:	Young women educated about intimate partner violence.

BEYOND 2015

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS. Erie County subsidizes child care for eligible families in our community. Child care is available to TANF or Safety Net households involved in approved training programs or work site assignments. It is also available to individuals transitioning from TANF or Safety Net assistance, employed families who earn 200 percent or less of the State Income Standard, or children services cases when day care is mandated. Children from these demographics have been shown to be less likely to enjoy academic success and are not as likely to graduate from high school.

Early childhood education is increasingly shown to be necessary for future academic achievement, and quality child care is more necessary than ever. New York State mandates that families are able to choose a child care provider. The quality of the child care varies greatly, with some having formal early education curriculum that prepares children for school, and others offering few organized activities.

ECDSS will work with its child care provider network and public school system to help ensure the child care it subsidizes prepares children for academic success. Child care providers will be provided the resources and information necessary to adopt and implement a curriculum for the children.

UTILIZE COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO EDUCATE AND GUIDE NEW PARENTS AND CARETAKERS IN THE PRACTICE OF SAFE SLEEP.

Tragedies can result from dangerous sleeping arrangements such as infants sleeping alone in unsafe surroundings or while sharing a bed with their parents. ECDSS and ECDOH already encourage parents and caretakers of young children to follow Safe Sleep recommendations to help reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other injuries to young children. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is the leading cause of death for infants between one month and twelve months of age. ECDSS and ECDOH will work with its community partners to raise awareness of Safe Sleeping practices.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING THE FOSTER CARE OR JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS.

Youth face many challenges as they transition into working adults. Acquiring all of the skills necessary is challenging even for children fortunate enough to grow up in supportive environments. Not every young person, however, is fortunate enough to have the support of a functional family or social network. Some youth have depended on Erie County in some capacity to help develop the skills necessary for achieving professional success and personal stability, often with involvement in the juvenile justice system. These individuals are more likely to be chronically unemployed and incarcerated as they become young adults.

Employment opportunities with lower skill requirements exists in Erie County today which can be filled by these young adults. However, when they reach 18 years old and age out of the juvenile justice

system, they often do not have the evidence of skills and work experience that makes them strong candidates for these jobs. The difficulty they have acquiring employment as a young adult puts them on a path toward lifelong dependency.

In order to increase the likelihood these young adults will be successful, they should have work experience prior to exiting the juvenile justice system. The opportunity for the youth to choose, get and keep a job provides strong modeling for their future and the needed track record for success. This is especially true for youth involved in the juvenile justice system because they often lack the support of a functional family or social network.

ECDSS will work with its partners in the economic development community to identify and secure job opportunities for youth in Erie County. The employer will pay the wages for the youth, while Erie County will screen and match the candidates to the employer, and provide the services and supports needed to help the youth become successful.

SECTION 2 CONCLUSION

A strong community invests in its future by developing its human capital, with each generation built stronger than the last. The systems and structures which promote positive outcomes for children, such as schools and families, are supported by local government so children are capable of meeting the most challenging situations. A culture is created where each child is valued and given the opportunity to be successful. All children are given an honest opportunity to be successful.

STRONG COMMUNITY MEMBER

Elsie (Dolly) Mangold

With a little bit of help, Erie County residents can take control of their health, like 94-year-old Elsie (Dolly) Mangold of Tonawanda. More than thirty years have passed since Dolly Mangold joined the Town of Tonawanda Senior Center and now at age 94 she continues to maintain her energy, vitality and spirit. She still participates in dance and attends 3 exercise classes every week. She maintains her immaculate home, and often drives her friends (most who are younger than her) helping them shop and taking them to doctor appointments. Dolly is loved and respected by her family, the hundreds of members at the Tonawanda Senior Center and throughout the community. Dolly will tell anyone who asks, “I am having the time of my life.”

As we age, major causes of illness and physical decline are often the result of loneliness, depression and isolation. Senior Centers offer a wide variety of activities and serve a delicious, nutritious meal sponsored by the Erie County Stay Fit Dining Program. These noon day meals create a sense of family, community and friendship so necessary for gaining and maintaining good health. The opportunity to connect with other older adults provides relief from the health dangers of loneliness, social isolation and feelings of depression.

Section 3: Lifelong Health

Strong communities promote lifelong health by helping residents to make healthy choices and provide easy access to care.

Like other “Rust-Belt” regions, Erie County has a large population of residents who suffer from chronic health conditions. Obesity, dementia, diabetes, and more affect Erie County residents at higher rates than in much of New York State. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s County Health Rankings, Erie County has the 9th worst health outcomes of any county in New York State¹⁹. Decades of industrial neglect have polluted our waterways and soil, increasing the prevalence of cancers linked to environmental factors. On an individual level, Erie County residents smoke and avoid exercise at higher rates than in much of the rest of the nation. Even our most famous “asset”, the chicken wing, is symbolic of poor nutrition. It does not have to be this way.

Recent years have seen sweeping changes to healthcare at both the State and Federal level. Between Medicaid redesign, the Affordable Care Act, and the introduction of Health Homes, major efforts are being made to improve the quality and availability of healthcare in our community at a systemic level. Through both the expansion of Medicaid and the ‘New York State of Health’ health exchange, more Erie County residents than ever before have access to health insurance. New York’s Medicaid Redesign Team is working to fundamentally restructure the health care delivery system. The initiatives presented in this section seek to *complement* these major efforts.

¹⁹ Please see the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s County health rankings at:
<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/new-york/2014/rankings/erie/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>

Although our resources are limited, Erie County will lead the charge to empower residents to make healthy choices and find the services they need to live long, productive lives. With a little bit of help, County residents have the power to take control of their health. Throughout this section you’ll find initiatives that leverage the day-to-day “touches” Erie County Government already has with most county residents. County Government’s established presence in senior centers, restaurants, and more puts us in a unique position to work *with* county residents to give them the tools they need to enjoy lifelong health.

Before turning to the initiatives that have been identified for 2015, a brief summary of recent successes is presented below.

EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

ERIE COUNTY WALKS. 64 percent of Erie County residents are overweight or obese. Something as simple as a daily brisk walk can help residents live a healthier life. This program provides an accessible, smartphone application-based walking program in Erie County Parks for residents to utilize to better their health. Maps, exact trail length and difficulty information will be made available.

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING. ECDOH is the lead agency for finding and preventing lead poisoning in children. Through a partnership with the New York State Department of Health and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, Erie County work with local pediatricians to monitor children for elevated blood levels, eliminate the sources of direct contamination and works to eliminate the sources of lead contamination in neighborhoods with housing stock pre-dating 1978.

CANCER SERVICES PROGRAM OUTREACH AND SCREENINGS. ECDOH provides access to free cancer screenings for uninsured and underinsured county residents, and enrolls those with cancer in a specialized Medicaid program to provide treatment. Target cancers include breast and colon cancer.

PREVENT OPIOD OVERDOSES THROUGH NARCAN DISTRIBUTION. ECDOH is the lead agency in the distribution of Naloxone (Narcan) to area police and fire departments. Increasing the availability of this powerful drug has prevented dozens of fatal overdoses from opioids including heroin and prescription painkillers. Direct training for local law enforcement agencies in the use of Narcan is available through ECDOH.

BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS FOR OLDER ADULTS. Through an inter-departmental partnership, a mental health screening tool was added to the assessment process used by the ECDSrSv to identify service needs of its clients. This screening tool, adopted from the DSM-V, is used to screen all ECDSrSv clients for potential mental health concerns. As part of the process any agreeable client with a concern, indicated by the screening tool, is referred to a mental health professional for follow up and linkage to appropriate services.

BREASTFEED FRIENDLY ERIE COUNTY. Recent research shows that if 90 percent of families breastfed exclusively for six months, nearly 1,000 deaths among infants could be prevented. The United States would also save \$13 billion per year as medical care costs are lower for fully breastfed infants than for never-breastfed infants. Breastfed infants typically need fewer sick care visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations.

ECDOH trains providers, hospitals and small business owners with the goal of increasing breastfeeding

rates. Through grant funding, it also provides financial support for individuals in the community to attain Certified Lactation Counselor training and certification. Additional, it trains community-based pediatric practices so it can be designated as a “Breastfeeding-Friendly Practice.”

ERIE COUNTY MATERNAL-CHILD HEALTH COLLABORATIVE. ECDOH is working with community partners to identify populations less likely to achieve healthy, full-term pregnancies and healthy post-partum maternal outcomes. Outreach to pregnant and post-partum females and dissemination of educational materials is being done with these partners.

ECDOH is also partnering with a local March of Dimes chapter to implement a countywide “Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait” campaign to decrease pre-term births. This campaign helps encourage parents get to the 39th week of pregnancy, which can greatly improve the health of the baby as major organs, such as the brain, lungs and liver, are still growing.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Erie County maintains a robust set of programs and services aimed at promoting general public health, while filling specific gaps in healthcare services in our community. For 2015, Erie County will focus on making it easier for county residents of all economic means to find and enjoy nutritious food, while redoubling its efforts to address the impact of chronic illness.

Goal: Healthy eating will be easier in Erie County.

Obesity and poor nutrition detract from both the quality and quantity of life. By arming county

residents with information about their food options and improving access to fresh, healthy options, Erie County can be a proactive force for healthy eating.

3.1 REINVIGORATE AND EXPAND “HEALTHY CHOICES” FOOD INITIATIVE.

This project provides independent Erie County restaurants the opportunity to create and display Nutritional labels. This system will allow the customer to make the “Healthy Choice” for themselves.

Community Wellness staff in ECDOH will promote the program’s benefits to area restaurants owners, encouraging them to take advantage of free “MenuCalc” software to develop nutritional labels for some or all of their menu items. It costs \$2,500 annually to lease the MenuCalc software. Core goals include:

- Increase the number of restaurants participating in the program.
- Increase the number of meals that are labeled with nutritional information.
- Provide necessary education to the public about the importance of making healthy dietary decisions as part of a concerted effort to decrease the prevalence of obesity and related diseases.

Lead:	ECDOH
Potential Partners:	WNY Chapter of the New York State Restaurant Association, UB School of Dietetics, Local Restaurants, Local Health Plans
Outcome:	Increase Number of participating restaurants displaying nutritional information.
Impact:	Erie County residents armed with information to choose healthier foods.

3.2 PROVIDE AND PROMOTE HEALTHIER FOOD IN NEIGHBORHOODS UNDERSERVED BY MAJOR SUPERMARKET CHAINS.

For many Erie County

residents, buying fresh fruits and vegetables is as simple as walking a few blocks to the neighborhood grocery store or getting in the car and driving a short distance to the supermarket. However, there are many, mostly low-income people, who do not have such easy access to healthy, affordable foods.

For these residents, the long distance between home and supermarket, coupled with a lack of public transportation options and/or privately-owned transportation, limits their ability to maintain a healthy diet. Communities where residents are unable to easily overcome the geographic disparity between the location of their residence and healthy food retailers have increasingly been described as food deserts. The United States Department of Agriculture defines food deserts as areas in which "at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store."

Through the Buffalo & Erie County Food Policy Council (BECFPC), Erie County will work towards achieving the following initiatives:

- Encourage small “Mom & Pop” restaurants to add/include one healthy menu item to their offerings.
- Encourage corner grocery stores (i.e., bodegas) to carry perishable produce. Provide refrigerators on an interim basis to enable bodegas to sell fruits and vegetables.
- Collaboration with community-based organizations to help disseminate information in targeted neighborhoods about Farmers’ Markets.
- Teach people how to bargain with farmers. Promote locations of Farmers’ Markets via social media channels.
- Work with food pantries and local grocery stores to provide classes on healthy shopping and cooking on a budget. Provide these classes in easy-access locations such as

daycare centers, WIC sites and food pantries.

- Work with grocery stores in low-income areas to offer cooking demos. Teach consumers how to use “new” foods; provide samples, recipes and classes.
- Identify five neighborhoods in Erie County with poor access to fresh foods. Work with community partners to develop “mobile grocery units” that would deliver fruits, vegetables and other select healthy items to these “food desert” designated neighborhoods. Provide cooking demonstrations at the same sites.
- ECDOH will research best practices on similar public health initiatives and present these initiatives to the BECFPC for potential alignment with their current strategic plan.

Lead:	ECDOH
Potential Partners:	BECFPC, ECDEP, Local Supermarkets, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Eat Smart NY, Healthy Kids-Healthy Communities, SUNY Buffalo.
Outcome:	Increased number of locations in Erie County where healthy food options are available.
Impact:	More county residents having access to healthy food options.

3.3 INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN SNAP PROGRAM TO PREVENT HUNGER.

Collaboration between public and non-profit partners in the food assistance network is critical to reducing hunger. Access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food is a public health concern that is best addressed through a multi-sector, multi-prong approach. Food pantries across Erie County provide community-based responses to the fight against hunger and can use resources to partner with governmental and nonprofit actors to boost participation in SNAP, taking full advantage of the federal dollars already appropriated for hunger relief. In partnership with the Food Bank of WNY, participation rates in the SNAP program will be

maximized through targeted outreach to households accessing food pantries. Every dollar of SNAP benefit generates \$1.84 in terms of economic activity.²⁰ ECDSS will provide information and training on SNAP for the staff and volunteers at Food Bank of WNY and other emergency feeding programs across Erie County. The Food Bank distribution network will disseminate SNAP information to households accessing emergency food pantries. The Food Bank of WNY will also assist ECDSS in facilitating the SNAP application process for households interested in applying for benefits.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	Food Bank of WNY, local food pantries
Outcome:	Increased awareness and program access to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program.
Impact:	Reduce food insecurity and maximize Erie County’s participation in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program.

3.4 EXPANSION OF STAY-FIT DINING PROGRAM.

The Stay-Fit Dining Program serves older adults in the community. The service delivered focuses on wellness through nutrition counseling, Club 99 (a peer-led physical exercise program), interactive health cooking demonstrations and opportunities for socialization in addition to a hot meal. The ECDSrSv values this comprehensive approach to keeping older adults not just at home, but active and engaged in their community.

ECDSrSv has focused on serving hard to reach populations, and strives to meet not only the expectations of our current participants, but also looks to anticipate the needs of some of our newer neighbors that may be included in the refugee and immigrant populations that are growing here in Erie County. With this in mind, we will aggressively seek out opportunities to serve hard to reach populations

²⁰ Hanson, Kenneth, and Elise Golan (2002). Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures Across the U.S. Economy. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

through innovative programming and the inclusion of the most relevant program partners. The Department will expand the Stay-Fit Dining Program by six sites in 2015.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Senior and community centers, refugee community stakeholders, community activists, Meals on Wheels of WNY, Ken-Ton Meals on Wheels, the Town of Amherst, Senior Services Advisory Board members.
Outcome:	Six new congregate dining sites.
Impact:	Increased quality of life for older adults.

Goal: *Erie County residents will have access to effective tools to help them manage their chronic health conditions and other health risks.*

As a nation, we spend 86 percent of our health care dollars on the treatment of chronic diseases. These persistent conditions—the nation’s leading causes of death and disability—leave in their wake deaths that could have been prevented, lifelong disability, compromised quality of life, and burgeoning health care costs.²¹

3.5 INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF REIMBURSABLE CHRONIC DISEASE SELF-MANAGEMENT AND DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT CLASSES. Ten percent of Erie County residents, age 20 and older, report being diagnosed with diabetes.²² As one ages, the likelihood of developing diabetes increases significantly.²³ Older adults, 65 and older, ultimately

are at highest risk for developing the disease, and nationally, more than one in four, 26.9 percent, are diabetic.²⁴ This is a distressing statistic because diabetes takes a tremendous toll on an individual’s health. Those with diabetes are more likely to suffer from heart disease, and are at significantly higher risk of stroke.²⁵ Ultimately, diabetes has a substantial economic impact on both individuals and the community. Individuals with diabetes have health expenditures 2 to 3 times greater than those without the disease, and on a community level, an estimated \$245 billion in costs nationally was associated with the disease in 2012.²⁶

Fortunately, there are positive steps individuals can take to reduce the likelihood their diabetes will lead to costly health complications. Diabetes is a self-managed disease, and those who are able to keep blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels within an acceptable range, will lead healthier lives.²⁷ Community education programs, like the Diabetes Self-Management program (DSMP) provide individuals with diabetes the tools and support they need. Availability of these classes however, is limited. In order to turn the cost curve on diabetes in Erie County, the availability of Diabetes Self-Management classes needs to be expanded, and offered through a coordinated system that ensures reliable and regular class offerings throughout the County.

Through a new coalition, the Erie County Evidence-based Wellness Council, community partners will work in conjunction with the ECDSrSv to complete several steps that are needed to take stock of

²¹ Koh, Howard. (2011, October). The State of Chronic Disease Prevention. Speech presented at Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions - United States Senate, Washington, DC.

²² 2014 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps

²³ American Heart Association

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Diabetes/Underst>

[andYourRiskforDiabetes/Understand-Your-Risk-for-Diabetes_UCM_002034_Article.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Diabetes/Understand-Your-Risk-for-Diabetes_UCM_002034_Article.jsp)

²⁴ *The Diabetes Epidemic Among Older Adults*, National Diabetes Education Program. 2011

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2012*, American Diabetes Association

²⁷ *The Diabetes Epidemic Among Older Adults*, National Diabetes Education Program. 2011

current capacity and to execute a plan to significantly increase availability of DSMP classes, including:

- Take an inventory of available Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) and DSMP programs that includes number of master trainers, number of trained peer leaders who can teach classes, rates of recruitment and retention, and the number of classes that can currently be offered in any given month.
- Align current programming with requirements for classes to receive reimbursement through Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, thus building a sustainable funding stream for programming.
- Develop a capacity building plan that includes building a central referral system that is consistent with NY Connects and NY State’s new No Wrong Door approach.
- Conduct coordinated outreach to physicians to raise awareness and increase participation.

Lead:	ECDSrSv.
Potential Partners:	Niagara County Office for the Aging; Catholic Charities; Health Foundation of Western and Central New York; P2 Collaborative; UWBEC; Erie and Niagara County senior centers.
Outcome:	Number of CDSMP or DSMP classes.
Impact:	Increased number of older adults maintaining their health and managing their health conditions.

3.6 INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF FALL PREVENTION PROGRAMMING IN ERIE COUNTY. Every year one in three adults age 65 and older will fall, and many of these falls will lead to a serious injury such as a hip fracture. For too many older adults, such a fall will make it difficult for them to live independently at home. Fortunately, falls are a public health problem that is largely

preventable.²⁸ Exercising, managing medications, having vision checked, and making living environments safer are all steps that can reduce the chances of taking a fall.²⁹

The ECDSrSv is committed to reducing the number of falls taken by older adults in our community, and is taking several steps to increase the availability of fall prevention programming in Erie County. First, through the recently reconvened Step Up to Stop Falls Coalition,³⁰ the Department will work with community partners to raise awareness of fall risks, change professional practice, and increase program options. In addition, the Department will expand its newest fall prevention effort, the Matter of Balance program. This nationally recognized, evidence based program was developed at the Roybal Center at Boston University and is designed to help reduce the fear of falling and increase the activity levels of older adults who have concerns about falling. A Matter of Balance consists of eight (8) group sessions led by trained facilitators. During these sessions participants learn how to view falls as controllable, set goals for increasing activity, make changes to reduce fall risk at home and learn exercises designed to increase strength and balance.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Blue Cross Blue Shield; Independent Health; Univera; local senior centers; the Erie County Step Up to Stop Falls Coalition.
Outcome:	Number of Matter of Balance classes.
Impact:	Reduce the rate of death and injury due to falls in Erie County.

3.7 ERIE COUNTY MILLION HEARTS CAMPAIGN. Million Hearts is a national initiative

²⁸ “Falls Among Older Adults. An Overview” Center for Disease Control and Prevention

²⁹ “Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls” National Council on Aging

³⁰ The Step Up to Stop Falls Coalition was created in 2007 by the (former Community) Health Foundation of Western and Central New York, and was comprised of professionals from the medical, social service, and higher education arenas.

to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes in the U.S. by 2017. Launched by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in September 2011, it aligns existing efforts, as well as creates new programs, to improve health across communities and help Americans live longer, more productive lives.

ECDOH will become an official partner in the Million Hearts campaign, and serve as the lead agency in collecting surveys from county residents to develop a comprehensive analysis of cardiovascular disease prevention in Erie County. Erie County will promote the “ABCS” of cardiovascular health including aspirin therapy, blood pressure control, cholesterol management, and smoking cessation.

Lead:	ECDOH
Potential Partners:	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Catholic Health, Local Health Plans
Outcomes:	Comprehensive Survey local county resident’s heart health knowledge and choices will be complete.
Impact:	Reduce the number of heart attacks and strokes in Erie County.

3.8 MR. FITNESS ACTIVE AGING VIDEO CLIPS. Today’s older adults are not like yesterday’s senior citizens. People are living longer, they are more active, and they use social media. It is not just aging baby boomers that are participating either. Those 74 and older make up the fastest growing demographic on social media today. They use Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and they watch YouTube. Finding reliable health information on-line however, is not always easy. Government agencies are beginning to respond to the need for reliable health information, and the increasing preference to get it online, by providing more content on public websites.

ECDSrSv has long been viewed as a trusted source of information by older adults. This includes health related information. ECDSrSv will do more in 2015 to

deliver this information in a fresh updated format that today’s older adults want. Starting in the summer of 2015, ECDSrSv will produce original video clips for the Erie County website that will provide health tips, demonstrate exercises, and share other information that will help older adults embrace active aging.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Department of Information Support Services; Mr. Fitness
Outcome:	8 Mr. Fitness Clips produced and posted on Erie County website.
Impact:	Increase the number of seniors taking part in daily exercise.

BEYOND 2015

AGE FRIENDLY ERIE COUNTY. Erie County and the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA Center) at the University at Buffalo will coordinate community resources to meet the goals associated with the American Association of Retired Persons’ (AARP) Age Friendly Community Network membership.

AARP’s network of Age Friendly Communities has grown consistently over the past two years. Erie County was eager to sign on to the effort and did so this past September. County Executive Poloncarz is pleased to highlight the initiatives and programs that have contributed to an age friendly Erie County, but recognizes that a more formal and comprehensive approach could benefit our entire community. In an effort to engage a wider range of stakeholders, ECDSrSv will engage community partners around the eight domains of an age friendly community as identified by the World Health Organization:

- Outdoor Space and Building
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect and Social Inclusion

- Civic Participation and Employment
- Communication and Information
- Community Support and Health Services

The ECDSrSv and the University at Buffalo’s IDEA Center will develop a five year timeline to carry out the activities associated with membership in AARP’s network. In the first 1 to 2 years such activities will include but not be limited to: recruiting an advisory committee, conducting a literature review and characterization of Erie County’s aging population, development of an action plan and progress report plan, as well as preparation of a baseline assessment of Erie County’s “age friendliness.” Years 3 through 5 will focus on assessment and alignment checks with community stakeholders. The initiative will conclude with the creation of a final portfolio, presentation to county stakeholders and identification of areas for future goals and maintenance.

healthy lifestyle choices for them and their families. Someday we hope, more and more county residents can enjoy lives as long and fulfilling as 94 years young Tonawanda Senior Center member Dolly Mangold.

SECTION 3 CONCLUSION

Promoting lifelong health is and will continue to be an ongoing goal of the Poloncarz administration. Many of the initiatives presented in the section will, when complete, boost Erie County’s capacity to promote lifelong health, but the work will continue.

As it stands, Erie County is trending *positively* on improving the clinical care in our community, but trending *negatively* when it comes to health behaviors like physical inactivity and adult obesity rates³¹. While continuing our noteworthy progress in areas like reducing the number of preventable hospital visits, when it comes to healthy living, we have a long road ahead of us.

Beyond 2015 Erie County will need to build upon current and new initiatives to make it easy for county residents to get information and make

³¹ 2014 – 2017 Community Health Assessment, Erie County, New York

STRONG COMMUNITY MEMBER

Zaw Win

Zaw Win is a 44 year old man from Burma who faced years of abuse in his home country for speaking out against its ruling regime. Like several thousand other Burmese, Zaw came to Buffalo in 2005 with the help of a refugee resettlement program. Once here, he became part of a community that prides itself in helping others. Within just a few short years, Zaw was able to establish a small business with the assistance of the Westminster Economic Development Initiative, which helped him to write a business plan and secure a microloan to open a Laundromat in his West-side community.

The help Zaw received came from many hands—government agencies, local non-profit organizations, and the faith-based community. Resettlement agencies helped him to set up a new residence; others helped him to make the most of the opportunity to set up a new life. This included English as a second language classes from Erie County. In the ten years that he has been in Buffalo, he has made the most of the help afforded to him and is now in a position to help others in the community who are trying to make their way in a new country. His humble Laundromat is now the home of The WASH Project, a neighborhood-based center that provides information on community services and cultural opportunities to others who find themselves in need of help. This year, he will also begin helping Erie County by serving on the Department of Senior Services Citizen Advisory Board where he will be able to articulate the unique needs of older adult refugees and immigrants.

Section 4: Help Where and When It Is Needed

Strong communities have services available when and where they are needed, and deliver them in a positive way.

No matter how strong a community is, or how tenacious and independent its people, everyone needs a little help from time to time. Erie County residents know this well. It is a rare winter when we do not experience a crippling snow storm. When they happen, the entire community turns out to help each other. Weather-related adversity is not the only kind we know. Most of us over the age of forty know someone who lost their job when local steel plants closed their doors in the seventies and eighties. Many of those hard working people found themselves in need of assistance from government agencies for the first time in their lives.

It is not always easy to ask for help and it is not always easy to find it. Several things can get in the way including where services are located and their availability in more remote communities. Access related problems are also driven by diversity. Communities with growing immigrant and refugee populations, like Erie County, have to be sensitive to cultural concerns and language barriers to ensure that all its residents have access to help when they need it.

Program reach and the accessibility of services are not only impacted by geography, language, and culture, they are also driven by government's service delivery choices and how well it does at making the public aware of available programs. People need to know that programs exist, have a willingness to take part in them, and those programs need to be effective and useful. Outreach efforts too, must take care to be effective. If they are presented in the

wrong language, or in a culturally insensitive way, they will not be accessible to all who may need them. Similarly, if outreach efforts depend upon outdated modes of communication, and fail to adapt to the media preferences of a changing population, they will not be successful.

Erie County has been working on reducing the obstacles that residents encounter when they need help, and the Poloncarz Administration has made significant strides on this front since 2012. Last year alone, Erie County government improved access to services by making them more widely available in the community, improving coordination, and bringing services directly to the places where individuals in need are likely to be such as local emergency departments and senior centers. Before turning to the initiatives that we have identified for 2015, a brief summary of current successes is presented below.

EFFORTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

NEW CONGREGATE DINING SITES. Two new dining sites opened in 2014—Williamstowne apartments in Cheektowaga and the Delavan Grider Community Center on the east side of Buffalo. The new sites target two populations that tend to need our services most—low income older adults living in the inner-city, and those living in senior housing that may have difficulty getting to our senior center locations.

EXPANDED AVAILABILITY OF HOME-DELIVERED MEALS. After a successful Request for Proposals, Erie County was able to partner with two new Meals on Wheels partners in 2014. Ken-Ton Meals on Wheels and Amherst Meals on Wheels were both able to increase their capacity to offer meals to the homebound frail elderly and disabled. In year one, this effort allowed Erie County to serve

almost 20,000 more meals than we would have otherwise. We anticipate that more than 37,000 additional meals will be served by our new partners in 2015.

FOOD FOR ALL. ECDSrSv teamed up with Food for All to combine monthly food demonstrations with SNAP outreaches that link older adults in need with help paying for groceries. Food demonstrations emphasize budget friendly ways to prepare healthy meals, and Food for All speaks about the SNAP program and uses discrete ways to identify those who need help. This effort improved accessibility by reducing stigma, and by bringing assistance to where those in need are likely to be—our area senior centers.

READY SET HOME. In 2014, Erie County successfully competed for additional funding from the New York State Department of Health to pilot a new program we call Ready Set Home. It is designed to bring Erie County's Aging and Disability Resource Center, NY Connects, and its services, to those in need by going out into the community to the places where they are most likely to be—hospitals and skilled nursing facilities.

Nationally, it has been recognized that hospitalization is one of the most critical pathways to nursing home placement, and local experience is certainly consistent with that. This is often a time when individuals and families are feeling overwhelmed by the health crisis and the new care needs it has created. Contacting NY Connects to discuss options sometimes never happens or is significantly delayed, resulting in an increased likelihood that someone does not make it back home. Ready Set Home allows us to help people in these situations. NY Connects staff complements existing discharge efforts by providing extra resources and assistance counseling patients and families. This immediately helps to overcome common obstacles related to patient fear and care giver anxiety. This strategy also allows NY Connects

to provide a bridge between the facility-based care team and in-home service providers, easing the process of putting services in place.

TRAUMA INFORMED HOMELESS SHELTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN. In 2014, Erie County collaborated with the Lt. Col. Matt Urban Human Services Center (Matt Urban Center) to establish a new kind of emergency homeless shelter for 50 women and children in the city of Buffalo: "Hope House." The program was designed to address the trauma families have faced and work to quickly return the family to permanent housing.

The Matt Urban Center provides shelter residents with intensive support services focused on rapid rehousing in order to minimize the stay at the shelter and reduce the impact that homelessness has upon families. The trauma informed programming specifically employs a comprehensive approach of a one-stop model of providing wrap-around services, best practice models of Housing first, and Rapid Rehousing activities.

The women have the opportunity to access resources at the Matt Urban Center such as job training opportunities, employment counseling and budgeting. The Hope Center has established relationships with over 30 agencies and work to link families and individuals to the services they need to become self-sufficient.

ERIE COUNTY RAPID REHOUSING AND HOMELESS PREVENTION PROGRAM. In partnership with Catholic Charities and Belmont Shelter, the ECDEP assists approximately 40 families to maintain their permanent housing or escape from homelessness. The Rapid Rehousing and Homeless Prevention Programs are funded through a \$200,000 grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Staff at ECDEP also participate in the local Continuum of Care selection process to provide funding to support permanent housing for the homeless population.

THE YEAR AHEAD

In 2015, Erie County will continue its efforts to improve access to services. We will focus on working through community partners to increase the availability of services in Erie County's rural towns and villages. We will increase our efforts to reduce language barriers and increase the availability of services delivered by members of our cultural communities. Plus, we will work on improving program quality through increased collaboration and greater transparency.

GOAL: *Erie County will strengthen the ability of all our residents to access help by offering services that accommodate cultural and linguistic differences.*

We all want services delivered by people who understand our concerns, our preferences, and our culture. Ensuring that residents are not precluded from accessing services because of their language is the minimum that good government is expected to do. We will go farther by working across populations to better understand cultural preferences and constraints, and to develop new service options that meet the needs of our increasingly diverse population.

4.1 ESTABLISH A NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE. Each year, Erie County becomes an increasingly multi-cultural community, rich with diversity. More than 2,000 refugees are resettled within Erie County annually and 6.4 percent of Erie County's population is foreign-born. Although these individuals contribute greatly to the success of our community, they have unique needs when they first settle and as they become acclimated to our community. One of the reasons why Erie County has seen its population rise

over the last several years is its ability to attract and retain immigrants and refugees.

Erie County will establish a New Americans Advisory Committee. This Committee will not try to supplant work done by any other organization. Rather, it will work to encourage access by all persons residing in Erie County, regardless of nation of birth or current citizenship status, to the full benefit, opportunities and services provided and administered by the County. The committee will also serve in an advisory capacity to the County Executive and County Legislature in developing policy and services that better serve the immigrant and refugee community.

Lead:	Office of the Erie County Executive
Potential Partners:	Erie County Legislature, Resettlement Agencies
Outcome:	Establishment of a New Americans Advisory Committee
Impact:	Improved services to immigrants and refugees in Erie County.

4.2 ASSESS SERVICE ACCESS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. Most individuals living in Erie County read, write, speak, and understand English. There are many individuals, however, for whom English is not their primary language. For example, 6.4 percent of Erie County residents are foreign born and 10.0 percent of the county's residents over age 5 speak a language other than English at home.³² These individuals have difficulty accessing government services due to having limited English proficiency.

Pursuant to Presidential Executive Order 13166: "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency" (August 11, 2000), agencies receiving federal funding must take reasonable measures to provide meaningful access to services for individuals with limited English proficiency. This "reasonableness" standard is

³²2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

intended to balance the need to ensure meaningful access by individuals with limited English proficiency to critical services while not imposing undue financial burdens on local governments.

The four-factor analysis is a flexible and fact-dependent standard that is used to determine the appropriate language assistance services to ensure an individual with limited English proficiency has meaningful access to that agency’s programs and activities. The four-factor analysis considers: (1) The number or proportion of individuals with limited English proficiency eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program; (2) the frequency with which individuals with limited English proficiency come in contact with the program; (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people’s lives; and, (4) the resources available to the program and costs.

After completing the four-factor analysis and deciding what language assistance services are appropriate, Erie County will take steps to ensure individuals with limited English proficiency have access to critical services.

Lead:	Erie County Executive Office
Potential Partners:	County departments, resettlement agencies
Outcome:	Plans developed for every county department.
Impact:	Increase in individuals with limited English proficiency accessing government services.

4.3 INCREASE LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY EMPLOYEES TO REFLECT LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITY. Erie County has experienced a population boom in refugees and immigrants. Many of these refugees and immigrants do not speak English or Spanish, the languages most readily available for most services. Erie County spends a significant amount of resources on interpreter and translation services to ensure

individuals with limited English proficiency receive access to services. For example, ECDSS spends \$160,000 annually for interpreter services. While there will be always be a need for translation services for languages that are rare, Erie County should have employees able to provide services to members of an ethnic group that have a large population locally. Erie County will take actions to increase the number of languages spoken by Erie County employees, including collaborating with resettlement agencies and other community groups to recruit people from these ethnic groups to take civil service exams and apply for positions within Erie County government.

Lead:	Personnel Department
Potential Partners:	ECDSS and Resettlement Agencies
Outcome:	Number of languages spoken by Erie County employees
Impact:	Reduction in amount spent for interpreter services.

4.4 IMPLEMENT MICROENTERPRISE CHILD CARE FOR REFUGEE COMMUNITIES. Many of the refugee and immigrant families settling in Erie County are eligible for temporary assistance from ECDSS, and they must adhere to the work activity requirements. One of the barriers identified for this growing population is the insufficient availability of culturally and linguistically sensitive child care. Child Care outside of the home typically is not a part of their culture. ECDSS will recruit immigrant and refugee community members to establish child care businesses and utilize the rural child care model to ensure a successful enterprise.

Lead:	ECDSS
Potential Partners:	CCRN, Buffalo State College Small Business Development Center, Journey’s End, Jewish Family Services
Outcome:	Number of child care businesses owned and operated by immigrants and refugees.
Impact:	Increase in immigrants and refugees participating in work activity requirements and achieving self-sufficiency.

4.5 IMPLEMENT A CONSUMER-DIRECTED HOME CARE PROGRAM FOR OLDER ADULT REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS IN URBAN SETTINGS.

Older adult refugees and immigrants often face a myriad of challenges as they make their home in our community. In addition to cultural and linguistic barriers, our new neighbors must deal with health concerns, employment challenges, and transportation issues. As this population ages, the services coordinated by Erie County and its partners will be of great value to them. Overcoming the cultural and language barriers associated with this service population, however, will be challenging. Bringing services into the home may be even more daunting to a family that has already been through a great deal of change. Offering consumer-directed service options is one way to make this process easier.

Many of our clients have significant functional impairments that make it difficult for them to meet their own daily needs, such as cooking for themselves, doing laundry and cleaning their homes. Our most vulnerable will often need hands-on assistance with very personal activities like toileting and bathing. Those who are not able to get this help in their homes, will usually end up living in a nursing home. Consumer-directed homecare empowers the client to find and hire an aide that can provide the help they need to perform these activities of daily living. The work is then paid for by the Department grants that pay for traditional homecare, often at a savings.

The ECDSrSv is currently using consumer-directed home care services to meet the needs of older adults in rural communities in Erie County. These areas have been difficult to serve in the past due to the lack of home care aides available. While home care aides may be available in urban settings, there is a shortage of those with the language skills to serve

the immigrant and refugee population. Consumer-directed home care services will allow the consumer to hire a neighbor, friend, or relative to meet their personal care needs in a culturally sensitive way. Consumer-directed services for older adult refugees and immigrants will help the ECDSrSv meet the needs of the frail elderly in this population while providing the additional benefit of offering an opportunity for employment where one did not exist in these communities, and quite possibly introduce the consumer-directed home care worker to a new career path.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Local refugee resettlement agencies.
Outcome:	Contract with appropriate service providers.
Impact:	Access to quality, culturally sensitive, home care services.

GOAL: *Erie County will improve access to services by working through neighborhood-based partnerships and building community capacity.*

One of the most basic and important determinants of sufficient access to programs and services is the location where those services are provided and the ability for individuals to get there. Those who live in remote parts of the county, those without reliable transportation, and those who can no longer drive, all have difficulty accessing services. In order to ease these difficulties, we must work with partners in communities throughout the County to meet the needs of our residents.

4.6 ASSIST FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ERIE COUNTY TO START AND MAINTAIN OLDER ADULT GROUP RESPITE PROGRAMS.

It is notoriously difficult for residents in remote parts of Erie County to access services because they are not readily available in

their towns and villages. By working with the faith-based community, the ECDSrSv will work to increase the availability of one important service for the frail elderly and their caregivers—older adult group respite programs. Such programs provide a safe, supervised, entertaining environment for memory impaired adults, thereby allowing their family caregivers temporary relief.

Statistics show that many times those receiving help from friends and loved ones outlive their caregiver because the stress burden is so heavy and they have no break. The caregiver focuses so much time on caring for their loved one that they tend to neglect their own health. Respite provides caregivers with a much needed break. During the time that their loved one is at a respite program, caregivers can pursue activities that help them maintain their own health and wellbeing; attend to their own medical appointments, exercise, or have a refreshing break from their daily routine.

Respite also benefits the person afflicted with memory impairment. The supervisory care is aimed at providing overall safety, security, and emotional well-being. The group interaction helps to maintain or enhance the individual’s self-worth and self-esteem and decrease the individual’s feelings of depression, withdrawal, or loneliness. The program can provide assistance initiating and participating in activities that bring purpose and meaning to the individual’s life.

There is a need for adult respite programs in the rural areas because there usually are not many adult day care centers in a reasonable driving distance. Trained volunteers provide stimulating, fun activities, gentle exercise, special guests, pet therapy, music, all at no charge.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Faith-based organizations
Outcome:	Up to ten faith-based organizations operating respite programs.
Impact:	More older adults with access to respite services in their community.

4.7 ESTABLISH AN ASSISTED ENROLLER PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT PROGRAMS.

For most public benefit programs, residents can apply online. However, some residents are not tech-savvy enough to navigate the internet and apply. For many, traveling to downtown Buffalo to apply for their benefits is also a barrier and they are unable to take advantage of the benefits to which they are eligible.

There are numerous community resources available with publicly available computers and employees or volunteers willing to assist the public, such as libraries or churches. However, without training, the employee or volunteer likely does not know how to adequately assist. If these individuals were trained, eligible individuals who are not tech-savvy would be able to apply for benefits within their community.

ECDSS will develop and implement a training program to allow employees or volunteers of institutions become assisted enrollers of public benefit programs. Graduates of the training program will be deemed Erie County Certified Benefit Enrollers. In addition to referring members of the public looking to apply to these institutions, ECDSS will advertise these institutions as places to get assistance.

Lead:	ECDS
Potential Partners:	BECPL, faith-based organizations, Food Bank of WNY.
Outcome:	Number of individuals trained how to assist individuals how to apply for benefits.
Impact:	More eligible people accessing benefits.

4.8 ASSIST OLDER ADULTS TO ACCESS BUFFALO SENIOR CENTERS AND STAY FIT CONGREGATE DINING SITES.

As one ages, it becomes increasingly difficult to take advantage of programs and services even if they are close to home, due to a lack of reliable transportation or an inability to drive. In order to meet the increasing demand for transportation to senior centers, the ECDSrSv is exploring a new model of volunteer transportation. This new model will also increase the opportunities for volunteerism.

Many of the neighborhoods in the city of Buffalo are changing. These neighborhoods may be seeing an increase in construction, or an influx of new residents. The Department has even heard accounts of suburban older adults moving back to the neighborhood they called home as a child. These changes bring great opportunity to meet the needs of Erie County's older adult population.

The Department will begin a pilot program with Buffalo CarShare and the Salvation Army where older adults will have the opportunity to receive free transportation to The Salvation Army's Golden Age Center. Volunteers recruited and trained both by the Department's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program and Buffalo Car Share will have access to vehicles supplied by CarShare. Upon success of the pilot the Department will look to replicate the program in other parts of the City of Buffalo. CarShare only maintains vehicles in the City of Buffalo, thus limiting the program to City sites at this time.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Buffalo CarShare; Salvation Army
Outcome:	Contract in place with Buffalo CarShare and a completed pilot program.
Impact:	Increased number of older adults visiting senior centers or congregate dining sites.

4.9 ESTABLISH A SHORT TERM COMMUNITY BASED PEER RESPITE USING A "LIVING ROOM" MODEL.

The setting in which services are delivered can make a difference in their effectiveness and affordability. The Living Room model offers individuals an alternative to presenting at a psychiatric emergency room. The model instead provides a warm, inviting living room atmosphere staffed largely by peers who have been or are recipients of behavioral health services. A goal of a peer respite center is to provide an alternative to inpatient or emergency department care that will help alleviate emotional distress in a home-like safe and secure environment. There is a growing base of evidence to support the living room model as a promising practice that promotes cost savings and positive impact on quality of life.

The program will offer a time limited respite where individuals can "gather" themselves with the support of peers and other service providers to learn and practice coping behaviors and re-engage with community based supports and treatment services. Maintaining a presence in the community also assists in minimizing potential disruptions to housing, family members, and employment.

This program is expected to serve approximately 5 individuals at any one time for a typical length of stay lasting from 5-7 days. This model is designed to break the cycle of repeated emergency hospitalizations by offering the individual a 24 hour/7 day a week alternative.

The program will also be required to market and educate the community about the service, appropriate referrals, and be diligent and effective at communicating consumer service plans to individual's supports and service providers.

Clients will benefit from this program because they will be able to avoid emergency room visits and

hospitalization by being in a safe place with peer supports.

ECDMH was awarded funding for this service which will be provided by Housing Options Made Easy. Presently, due in part to its unique needs and funding limitations the program is struggling to find a site location. We are working with the Buffalo Psychiatric Center (BPC) to use existing space for start-up, and are also pursuing other alternatives such locations that had previously been used as community residences.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	Housing Options Made Easy, BPC, Behavioral Health Service providers, NYSOMH
Outcome:	Individuals will have access to respite services in the community
Impact:	Less disruption in peoples' lives, fewer hospitalizations.

4.10 PURSUE THE EXPANSION OF BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS.

Living in an age where access to the internet is no longer a luxury but an ever increasing necessity, we must take measures to ensure that throughout Erie County there is equitable access to high-speed internet. Today in Erie County, access to high speed internet is sporadic where a part of one municipality has access but the bordering municipality does not. This access inequality seems to be more prevalent in both urban centers and rural areas. Erie County, along with our partners, will lead the way in beginning the dialogue of what fair and consistent access to high speed internet may look like in the future.

As a means of beginning the discussion of expanding high-speed internet, the County, along with our partners will issue a RFP to undertake a comprehensive analysis of existing infrastructure, gaps in service, and potential models of connecting the necessary pieces to establish more equitable access to high speed internet.

The additional benefit of this initiative would be the potential enticement for employers that could take advantage of high speed internet for their business.

Lead:	ECDEP
Potential Partners:	Erie County Department of Public Works, Erie County Legislator Patrick Burke, National Grid
Outcomes:	Initiate a feasibility study to determine existing infrastructure and potential methods of expansion of broadband internet
Impact:	A thoroughly researched and wide encompassing plan that the region can pursue as a means of expanding high speed internet throughout Erie County

GOAL: *Erie County will increase access to positive outcomes by working to close program-driven gaps in service.*

When one thinks about barriers to access, it is natural to focus on easy to understand factors such as location and language. However, some of the most significant and persistent barriers to individuals accessing the help they need are associated with the program itself. It is all too common for gaps in service to result from program design and how services are implemented. Program-driven barriers to access affect all of us, regardless of where we live or what language we speak. No matter how well we do addressing these other issues, we will come up short unless we do more to close program-driven gaps in service. We commit to do so in 2015.

4.11 IMPROVE THE COORDINATION AND DELIVERY OF CARE FOR MENTALLY ILL INDIVIDUALS IN CONTACT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

The criminal justice system is not particularly well suited to deal with the mentally ill. However, contact between the two has become increasingly frequent as law enforcement officials are frequently thrust into

situations where they have to deal with this population, often without the specialized training that would equip them to achieve successful outcomes. Jails and detention centers have become the housing of last resort for many of the mentally ill, and are struggling to provide the necessary treatment and services. When this population is discharged from custody, it is often back into the same circumstances that led them into trouble with the law to begin with.

To help improve the coordination and delivery of care, the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (NYSDCJS) has initiated a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program with 10 counties in New York State, including Erie County. This is a multifaceted program designed to enhance the identification, screening, treatment, management, and supervision of identified individuals with mental health issues who come to the attention of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Agencies from across the spectrum, representing law enforcement, the jails, the courts, community, and service providers, will work together to improve outcomes for the mentally ill people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, from first police contact to post-detention community supervision.

ECPD and ECDMH will coordinate the Erie County program and act as liaison with NYSDCJS. Several actions will be taken including participation in an exercise to map out where, and how, the mentally ill come into contact with various points of the criminal justice system. Partners will then prepare a plan to better address mental health needs across the criminal justice continuum, and divert them from the criminal justice system at the earliest possible time.

Lead:	ECPD and ECDMH
Potential Partners:	Law enforcement agencies (including Buffalo Police Department and the Erie County Sheriff's Office); Crisis Services; Mental Health providers; the Courts; ECDSS; NYSDCJS
Outcomes:	Identification of additional diversion programs for repeat non-violent mentally ill offenders utilizing the sequential intercept model; better collaboration among agencies and service providers; additional first-line responders using the Crisis Intervention Team approach; provision of specialized training to ECPD staff.
Impact:	Improved treatment outcomes and reductions of recidivism for individuals with serious mental illness.

4.12 REDUCE HOUSING-RELATED PROBLEMS FOR THOSE WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES.

Supportive housing pairs rental subsidies with supportive services for individuals, and is a cost-effective way to help people live more stable, productive lives. The target population for this additional Supportive Housing is Erie County residents who are being discharged from the BPC.

Stable housing allows individuals to focus on other quality of life issues, such as mental illness and substance abuse, without having the additional pressure of having to worry about shelter. When people have stable housing, they are able to focus on medical and dental problems that may have been ignored when in unstable housing or homelessness. Regular physicals and follow up appointments for chronic diseases assist the individual to return to living a health life.

The individuals served in this program have been inpatients in the BPC. They need help reestablishing themselves in the community. These individuals typically are discharged with limited funds, few or no personal items, and are without benefits until they satisfy the 45-day waiting period for those benefits. Individuals are in need of food, personal items and

clothing, as well as assistance with transportation. In many cases it has been difficult to obtain utilities because the person has outstanding bills.

Funding for this program was awarded in late 2014. However, startup was very slow and was not improving through time. ECDMH began working with partners to actively address startup problems and to improve access to this resource including:

- Working with NYSOMH to clarify rules around use of the \$5,000 per person enhanced funding and encourage the agency to take advantage of this valuable resource;
- Requiring screening to take place the next business day after individuals are identified by the Psychiatric Center for this program instead of the NYSOMH standard 15 days; and
- Including the establishment of transitional apartments for use as temporary housing after discharge from the Psychiatric Center as part of this initiative;

The establishment of transitional apartments will be a key to the success of this program. Under the usual supportive housing program, it can take upwards of one month from when an individual is accepted into the program until they move into their scattered site apartment in the community because 1) it takes time to find an affordable apartment in a neighborhood that is acceptable to them and 2) most leases start on either the first or fifteenth of the month. With a transitional apartment, individuals move in as soon as they can be discharged and immediately begin their transition into the community. If they like the transitional apartment, they have the option of staying and the agency will identify another apartment for transition.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	BPC, ECMC, Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, NYSOMH
Outcomes:	36 Additional individuals with Mental Illness will have safe, affordable housing in the community
Impact:	Fewer hospitalizations and less homelessness.

4.13 ESTABLISH PROFESSIONAL/PEER MOBILE SUPPORT TEAMS TO HELP THOSE DISCHARGED FROM PSYCHIATRIC INPATIENT FACILITIES TRANSITION TO COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES.

ECDMH will establish Professional/Peer Mobile Support teams to provide mobile treatment, support and follow-up after individuals are discharged from the BPC and other psychiatric inpatient facilities, such as those located at the ECMC, in order to help in the transition to community based services. High risk individuals often do not make follow up appointments and do not receive the services that will help them stay safely in the community, and this service will help prevent this from occurring.

Upon referral, individuals will be assigned to a team consisting of one professional counselor and one peer. In order help people receive essential community services during the critical days and weeks following discharge, the teams are available to assist the individual during non-traditional hours (holidays, weekends, and afterhours).

Individuals appropriate for this service are those that are discharged from the State Psychiatric Center or ECMC, who are at significant risk for re-hospitalization and/or presentation at hospital emergency departments.

In order to ensure success of this program:

- Pre-discharge planning will include the Mobile Transitional Team so that they can support an effective discharge plan; this is

especially true with shorter duration stays typically found an Inpatient Psychiatric Hospitalization;

- Integration and collaboration of this service with other community service providers will take place in order to ensure effective communication of service plan needs with all providers;

Individuals will have a number to call if they have concerns after traditional providers have closed for the day or if they need help with something unexpected. The Mobile Professional/Peer Support Team will benefit Erie County residents by assisting individuals to receive the services and supports that they need so that they can be successful in the community, whether it is improving their relationships, getting a job, volunteering or going back to school. This benefits the individuals, their families and our entire community.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	Suicide Prevention and Crisis Services, ECMC, Mental Health Peer Connection, BPC, NYSOMH
Outcomes:	Individuals with Mental Illness will be served by support teams when they are discharged from institutions
Impact:	Individuals will be more successful in the community.

4.14 IMPLEMENT A HEALTH HOME-JAIL PILOT SO THAT HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS WILL HAVE BETTER ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS IN THE COMMUNITY WHEN THEY LEAVE THE HOLDING CENTER. A Health Home is a care management service model in which all of an individual's caregivers (including those assigned by the criminal justice system) communicate with one another so that all of a patient's needs are addressed in a comprehensive manner. The primary task of care management programs is the coordination of services between various agencies and service providers. Care Managers also provide a liaison

function between the service providers and the criminal justice system.

Neither the Erie County Holding Center staff nor the Forensic Mental Health Service currently has an easy way of finding out if an incarcerated individual is enrolled in a Health Home. This makes reentry into the community more difficult and increases the likelihood they will be incarcerated again after being released. Not only is ECDMH and Health Homes ready to improve the situation, but the Erie County Sheriff's Office is eager to address this issue as well.

ECDMH, the Health Homes and the Erie County Sheriff's Office will work to develop an automated daily process to match new Erie County Holding Center admissions with Health Home rosters. In the first phase, Care Management providers will be informed of recent jail admissions. The second phase will make Care Management referrals and linkages for individuals high risk/high need individuals in the Erie County Holding Center.

Lead:	ECDMH
Potential Partners:	Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors, Erie County Sheriff's Office, area Health Homes
Outcomes:	An automated process will be implemented to match Holding Center inmates with Health Homes
Impact:	Individuals will have better access to resources and supports in the community when they leave the Holding Center.

4.15 TRAINING PROGRAM ON BENEFITS ALLOTTED TO VETERANS. There are numerous benefits afforded to men and women who served in the military. Often, these individuals come to Erie County for assistance because they face a challenge or hardship. The Erie County employee or contracted provider that assists the veteran may not be aware of the additional ways to help them. Rather than helping the individual take advantage of the enhanced services that their veteran status may

allow, the Erie County employee or contracted provider will often follow the typical response to the situation, instead of accessing specialized services available to people who served in the military. Additionally, the veteran’s challenge or hardship may be related to their military experience the typical response may not be appropriate.

ECVSA will establish a training program about the benefits allotted to men and women who served in the military for appropriate Erie County employees and contracted agencies. This training program will improve the response all health and human service departments has when assisting a veteran.

Lead:	ECVSA
Potential Partners:	All Erie County Health and Human Services Departments, Personnel Department, Contract agencies
Outcomes:	Erie County employees trained
Impact:	More men and women who served in the military accessing veteran benefits.

GOAL: *Erie County will improve access by raising awareness of services, partners, and the outcomes of our work.*

A community can have impeccably designed and implemented programs that are widely available and still have problems related to access. It is far too common for individuals in need of assistance to not be aware of available services that can help. Even more pervasive is a lack of awareness of program outcomes. In 2015, Erie County will work to address these issues by providing members of the community with the information they need to not only access services, but to help us do better by making program data available to those who wish to advocate, apply for grants, or simply bring evidence to bear of an ongoing community need.

4.16 COMPREHENSIVE OUTREACH PLAN TO BETTER REACH THE AGING AND DISABLED POPULATION IN ERIE COUNTY.

The ECDSrSv is working to enhance its current public education, advocacy, and outreach efforts to more effectively raise awareness of its services and programs including, but not limited to, NY Connects, Stay Fit Dining, Choose Healthy, and the Insurance Resource Center. When successful, the Department will be able to: more effectively reach its traditional service population—older adults and their caregivers; reach the newest members of the community—immigrants and refugees; more effectively communicate across the generations, especially to baby boomers; and articulate its value to existing and potential community partners.

Lead:	ECDSrSv
Potential Partners:	Senior Services Advisory Board, Erie County Long Term Care Council, Erie County’s EISEP case management contract agencies, the WNY Evidence-based Wellness Council.
Outcome:	Comprehensive Outreach Plan
Impact:	Greater awareness of resources available for seniors, the disabled, and their caregivers.

4.17 SERVICE ANIMAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN.

Some of our most essential partners in the community are the service animals who are dedicated to helping individuals with a wide range of disabilities so they can better navigate their surroundings. Many people in the local disability community use service animals in their daily lives, people who are blind and wounded service members use service animals each day to maneuver their community, take public transportation, etc. People with autism or seizure disorders use animals to calm or to let them know of an oncoming seizure. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a service animal is ‘any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability.’

The Erie County Office of Disabilities has spoken to people with service animals who have had difficulties in local businesses as well as members of law enforcement. Some individuals with service animals have been turned away from restaurants, grocery stores, restaurants, theaters, taxis, and many places of public accommodation because the establishment owner is unaware of their legal obligations.

At this time, little is being done for people who use service animals to make the community aware of their needs to have and use the animals in public places of accommodation. Erie County Office of Disabilities will work with service animal trainers as well as disability service providers to create an awareness campaign to make local business owners aware of their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the important job service animals have to do.

Lead:	ECOD
Potential Partners:	Commission for the Blind, Wounded Warriors, WNY Heroes, Olmsted Center for Sight, National Federation for the Blind, WNY Independent Living, NYS Commission for the Blind
Outcome:	Increased awareness of ADA requirements.
Impact:	More disabled residents able to access the community.

4.18 ESTABLISH A DATA CLEARINGHOUSE FOR ERIE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES. As the direct and indirect provider of numerous health and human services and programs in our community, Erie County creates and maintains copious amounts of information. Generally, this information is not made available to the public and is only shared with oversight officials. Some of this information is available on the New York State Open Data website (www.data.ny.gov) on a county-wide basis. This type of data has encouraged innovative uses to advance the public good by enabling third parties to leverage the potential of this information through the development of applications and

services that address public and private demands. However, having this information only available by county limits the information’s potential locally because the characteristics of various pockets of our community differ. In order to encourage use, the Erie County Executive will charge the Erie County Division of Information and Support Services with creating a Human Services Data Clearinghouse to make available information concerning human service services and programs it administers.

This clearinghouse will contain information about services collected directly and through agencies that contract with Erie County to deliver services on its behalf. The clearinghouse will likely run on either the CKAN data management system (Santa Cruz Open Data and Denver Open Data Catalog) or through the Socrata Open Data Portal (Cook County Open Data Portal and New York City Open Data).

Lead:	Division of Information and Support Services
Potential Partners:	All Health and Human Services Departments
Outcome:	Establishment of a data website
Impact:	Increased public awareness of human services in Erie County

BEYOND 2015

CREATION OF A COMMUNITY HEALTH DASHBOARD, which will help us better track population health statistics within the county. Both will result in new efforts and initiatives beyond 2015 that will help Erie County meet its continual obligation to find new and better ways to help its residents.

CREATION OF A COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEM FOR HOMELESS SERVICES. The Homeless Alliance of Western New York with a team of 45 members of the homelessness service-provider community has started work on creating a coordinated entry system in Erie County. Such a

system, in which every entry point uses the same assessment tool and referral criteria, has been shown in recent national research to be a key component of a successful homeless program. The quality of client screening and assessment is enhanced, allowing program assistance to be targeted where it can be most effective. As a result, the system for preventing and ending homelessness is less fragmented and available resources are used more efficiently.

SECTION 4 CONCLUSION

Improving access to services must be an ongoing effort by county government. Even if we are 100 percent successful at reducing the barriers targeted by the 2015 Initiatives, this long standing problem that all communities face will not be eliminated in the course of a year. Like economic development, watching for barriers to access and working to eliminate them is the constant work of a good government that is doing all it can do to help those it serves during their times of need.

Conclusion

“When we focus on people's needs, they become clients in a service system. When we focus on their strengths, they become citizens of a community.”³³

The word “community” evokes imagery that varies widely. When some think of “community,” the towns and villages they call home come to mind. For others, “community” is defined by a particular characteristic that is held in common—the academic community, for instance. Still others would say at the heart of “community” is shared values, sentiments, and beliefs.

No matter how one defines it, Erie County is a community. It is a community made up of rural towns, quaint suburban villages, and the second largest city in New York State. It is a community rich in history that has experienced tremendous prosperity and traumatic economic decline. This common geography, this common history, certainly contributes to Erie County being a community; but, the essential ingredient has always been the people who call Erie County home. Erie County's residents are strong, resilient, tenacious people. Together, we make up a strong, resilient, and tenacious community.

Erie County is a strong community that has gotten stronger over the past several years. Erie County can grow even stronger, and it will do so. Now is the time to leverage burgeoning opportunity so that all members of our community grow stronger together.

Looking back on what has been presented in the *Initiatives for a Stronger Community*, we can see that the strategies we will pursue in 2015 and beyond,

are rooted in a two-fold belief. We believe that our role, as Erie County government, is to help put all our residents in a better position to tap into their personal strengths, and that in many ways County government is uniquely positioned to lead in this effort. We also believe, however, that County government too must improve and become stronger, and it needs help from the community to do so. As we help others to identify and tap into their strengths, they help us to do the same.

HELPING PEOPLE TO GROW STRONGER:

Several of the initiatives presented in this document aim to help our residents to do better, and to make the most of the opportunities that our stronger community is creating right now. There are more jobs in the Erie County economy right now than there have been in decades. Our initiatives for a stronger community focus on helping some of our most vulnerable residents to secure and keep those jobs. This includes raising awareness of the tremendous resourcefulness and unique perspectives that local employers can secure by hiring someone with a disability. It includes efforts to further tighten the wage gap between men and women. And, it includes providing support to those in our community that need a second chance to contribute to our stronger community, including those on public assistance, on parole, and those who have been incarcerated.

Our local economy is increasingly becoming knowledge-based. The new opportunities surfacing in conjunction with the rapidly developing medical corridor, for instance, will help fuel a sustained renaissance for Buffalo and Erie County that we believe will last for generations. All of our children need high quality education if they are going to be able to participate in that exciting economic renaissance. This starts by supporting our schools, our families, and our community partners who are leading the charge to improve educational outcomes. Several of the initiatives discussed here do just that by improving the supportive role that

³³ Jim Diers (2011) “Building Strong Communities Means We Can Hold Government to Account” *The Guardian*
<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2011/jun/16/building-strong-communities-government-account>

county government can play in the educational system.

Most importantly, the initiatives presented above recognize that we must do all we can to ensure that our residents, and especially our children, are able to make the most of new opportunity and not be derailed by poor health, abusive relationships, or a lack of support. The initiatives that seek to ensure that children are safe, that senior citizens have food, and that all residents can get help when they need it, are among the most important of these endeavours.

HELPING COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO GROW STRONGER. It was stated in the Introduction that a fundamental value of the Poloncarz Administration is the belief that government can be a driving force in improving the community and the lives of its residents. It does not shy away from this responsibility by meekly accepting the charge that government cannot be part of the solution because it is, in fact, the problem itself. The Poloncarz Administration flatly rejects that proposition. By doing so, it accepts the duty to be a good leader when a leader is needed, and a good partner when a partner is needed.

Government is vulnerable to the charge that it is “the problem” because oftentimes it does not tend to its own care and feeding. It neglects the maintenance needed to be a good leader and a good partner. Several of the initiatives presented within this document are turned inwards, and aim to improve government processes in recognition that those processes can stand in the way of residents getting what they need to achieve the personal outcomes that go on to contribute to an overall stronger community.

Good government, that provides good leadership and good partnership, must reach out to the community it serves and seek counsel. Only by providing the community with a mechanism to voice

its needs, its concerns, and its ideas for addressing those things can government do better at the job it has been entrusted to do. Each of the sections above includes at least one initiative that sets up a mechanism for community input. These include the Welfare Advisory Board, the Community Coordinating Council on Children and Families, the New Americans Advisory Committee, and the emerging cross-sector collaboration behind the Age Friendly Community initiative.

SUMMATION: In sum, the work presented here reflects a hopeful vision for the years ahead. Erie County is a strong community. It is stronger today than it was just a few short years ago. It is without reservation that we say Erie County will only get stronger in the days ahead. The initiatives presented here will contribute to that growing strength by taking steps to extend the reach of opportunity so that all our residents can take hold of it. They will also help to broaden emerging opportunities by leveraging the many assets that our increasingly diverse community has at its disposal, including a rich array of cultures and languages. It is a truly exciting time to be part of the Erie County community. It is a privilege to serve it and to help Erie County and its citizens grow stronger.