



Center for Thriving Communities

A YEAR OF ACTION

# Community Leadership Training Program

## Research-Based Premise

- » The Centers for Disease Control found that community-based participatory research was a model to shift power relationships between researchers and communities affected by health inequalities, finding equity in collaborations by joining the strengths of researchers and communities to eliminate health disparities
- » According to the National Institutes of Health, there has not been measurable improvements in the majority of health disparity objectives in part because many initiatives do not embody the kind of community voice, support, and participation that is necessary for sustainable long-term results and because many initiatives are divorced from other significant community-development strategies that have the potential to influence the known determinants of health disparities
- » The National Academy for State Health Policy found that successful approaches to address health disparities rely on state agency collaboration and partnerships with communities to identify and align resources and efforts toward common goals
- » The Columbia University Irving Medical Center stated it most simply in the title of their January 2023 paper: It takes a COMMUNITY to reduce health disparities

their health and community priorities as well as to dive more deeply into the barriers, experiences, fears, and history that had brought them to their current station. This experience highlighted the need for tailored approaches as the needs varied slightly from location to location; however, the barriers, constraints, histories and environments were vastly different by location. This not only demanded a solution designed for the area but also required that the solution be led by people with intricate knowledge of the people, history, challenges, and landscape to create a plausible solution that would generate community buy-in.

In 2024, the Center for Thriving Communities launched the Community Leadership Training (CLT) program to work with a small number of local grassroots organizations to have them determine a viable solution to an issue in their community. To support that work, the Center is providing organizational and structural support, educational opportunities and experiences, connections to experts in the field and other organizations engaged in similar work, and a mini-grant application process to provide them with the knowledge, infrastructure, and demonstrated results to then be able to continue their work beyond the scope of the CLT program.

The CLT program is designed as a pipeline, allowing organizations to enter where they need to get tailored support for their specific situations.

## Community Leadership Training Program

In 2023, the Center for Thriving Communities met with over 1,500 community members across the state to learn about



EMPOWERING Resources For All





Center for Thriving  
Communities

**A YEAR OF—  
ACTION**

## Community Leadership Training Program



We initially approached nine organizations to participate in the CLT program; four organizations were chosen. Of those four organizations:

- » Two are in urban communities; two are in rural communities
- » Two primarily serve seniors; two serve a mix of adults
- » Two primarily serve African-American community members; one primarily serves Latino community members; one primarily serves Caucasian community members
- » The organizations are located in Chattahoochee, Jacksonville, Melrose, and Orlando
- » One organization entered the pipeline in the Establishment phase; the other organizations entered in the Program Development phase
- » The organizations are addressing the following issues in their communities through the CLT program
  - Improving health by increasing access to healthy food and increasing knowledge of healthy food preparation
  - Improving social connection and knowledge of food as medicine through community gardening and education
  - Increasing African American participation in community health fairs and testing
  - Decreasing food waste by connecting food pantry distribution to culturally relevant dishes and recipes

### What We Have Accomplished

- » We reviewed partners from the Community Engagement experience and identified nine potential organizations to be a part of the program. After connecting with those organizations and conducting our internal review process, we selected four
- » We met with the leaders of each organization. Each completed the onboarding application and identified up to 2-6 team members
- » One organization needed to establish a 501(c)(3), so we conducted a series of sessions with that organization to determine mission, vision, organizational structure, governance, by-laws, and other organizational processes before taking it to a lawyer to initiate the application process. We met with all four organizations to start with an organizational assessment. After reviewing the program and an overview of the work, we met with each team individually to ask them to identify what were the greatest needs in their

community, who they served, what skills or services they excelled in providing, and define their capacity in people, finances, systems knowledge, network, and organizational structure. Each team used that information to craft a program purpose statement to define the work

- » We hosted an organizational “speed dating” session, with over 29 experts from more than 20 organizations, on a series of topics to allow team members to learn more about their areas of engagement and connect with other leaders in the field. Panel discussions included Food as Medicine, Medications to Seniors, Community Gardens, Multicultural Food Distribution, Policy/Advocacy, Social Connection Through Nutrition, and Building Trust Across Ethnicities. A training on evaluation helped teams develop a measurement framework
- » We met with each team individually to assist them in creating a logic model for their project and to finish completing their project statements
- » We launched the grant application process and all teams have successfully submitted their applications

### Upcoming Events

- » Hosting a Communications panel session to provide information on:
  - Communicating with constituents
  - How to best leverage social media
  - Tools for effective communication
- » Monitoring and providing support during project implementation
- » Hosting a grant writing training, including information on partnerships and fiscal agents
- » Two Policy/Advocacy sessions
  - One session will focus on opportunities at the national and state level and strategic partnerships to assist in the work
  - One session will focus on local advocacy, often non-political advocacy, to make an impact in your community
- » Group wellness support to ensure that team members are rejuvenated as well as the community’s mental well-being is considered in the work
- » Each team will submit a final report on their projects with measurable data to quantify their impact
- » Teams will provide feedback on the CLT program to provide insights and opportunities for improvement
- » We will host another Evaluation session, where we highlight a variety of evaluation methods to consider for different types of work as well as a variety of data collection tools that can be used and how to design them
- » We will host a session on funding, examining where to find funding, what kinds of opportunities are available, and how to put yourself in a position to qualify for receiving funding
- » We will conduct a final review of the program, write a paper, and consider improvements to make as we consider implementing a second cohort in 2025

[https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2023/23\\_0077.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2023/23_0077.htm)  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK215366/>  
<https://nashp.org/partnerships-to-address-health-disparities/>  
<https://www.cuimc.columbia.edu/news/it-takes-community-reduce-health-disparities>

EMPOWERING  
Resources For All





Center for Thriving Communities

# A YEAR OF ACTION

## collectively Creating Socially Connected Communities



According to the U.S. Surgeon General, we are experiencing a loneliness epidemic that is responsible for our global mental health crisis. One out of every four people is struggling with mental health issues and social connection has been identified as a major contributor. Over 42% of youth have persistent feelings of sad or hopelessness. Currently, loneliness is one of the biggest problems for kids.

In response to this critical need for social connections, Dr. Julie Radlauer, a leading expert on how the social influences in our lives can impact our level of happiness created "CONNECT. 100 Ways to Create Happiness in Your Life: A Guide to Focusing on the Social Influences of Mental Health." Using this workbook, Dr. Radlauer created an interactive learning lab where she shares current research as well as tangible solutions in a fun engaging way. In this workshop, participants learn about how the Social Influences in our lives can impact our level of happiness and how to bring this knowledge into your community to support better mental health.

### Together we can change the narrative on mental health.

Dr. Radlauer has brought this interactive training to three Florida communities including Miami, Jacksonville and Broward County. More communities will engage in the 2024 workshops, including Port St. Lucie and Gainesville, Florida.

### Training Results

84% of participants were satisfied with the topics presented in the training. 82% felt that the training provided them with valuable information. 78% felt that they learned something new that would be helpful in their life or work. 84% of participants plan to use or implement something they learned in this training.

In the session, Dr. Radlauer shows a video of a baby laughing at papers being torn. "The laughing baby video- the value in simple things. We enjoy the baby's laughter while the baby enjoys the ripping of the paper. Simple actions can bring so much joy that we overlook." Others reported "This training was very beneficial and valuable." One participant shared "Thank you for reminding me of my WHY... this training was awesome!!". Another shared, "Awesome training, my only suggestion is that you do these trainings more often. It's more beneficial than most know".

### Participant Demographics

- » 87% Female
- » 3% Transgender
- » 32% Hispanic/ Latino
- » 32% African American, or Black
- » 37% White
- » 11% Biracial
- » 55% Were between the ages of 41-64
- » 5% Were 18-25 year olds
- » 31% 26-40 year olds.
- » 8% over age 65

### Social Influences of Mental Health

9 Science-Based Elements of Connection & Support to Create Happiness



### »» What Are Social Connections?

**Social connection** is the experience of feeling close and connected to others. It involves feeling loved, cared for, and valued, and forms the **basis of interpersonal relationships**.

EMPOWERING Resources For All





Center for Thriving  
Communities

# A YEAR OF— ACTION

## Mindful Matters

According to the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- » In 2021, more than 4 in 10 (42%) students felt persistently sad or hopeless and nearly one-third (29%) experienced poor mental health
- » In 2021, more than 1 in 5 (22%) students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1 in 10 (10%) attempted suicide
- » Nearly half (45%) of LGBTQ+ students in 2021 seriously considered attempting suicide—far more than heterosexual students
- » Black students were more likely to attempt suicide than students of other races and ethnicities

### » About

Mindful Matters is a youth-driven mental well-being experience created in partnership with Dr. Selena Webster-Bass, founder and CEO of the Voices Institute. The training objective of the program is to promote health and healing for 12 – 18-year-olds (middle and high school students). Through interactive activities involving artistic expression, nature, and movement; youth were given gracious space to feel, **to be real, and to deal.**

- » **Permission to Feel** – Building vocabulary to name emotions (speaking one’s truth)
- » **Permission to Be Real** – Gracious space to discuss strengths and struggles (storytelling element)
- » **Permission to Deal** – Coping skills, resilience skills and self-care (skill-building)

Youth imagineers co-facilitated sessions to ensure cultural responsiveness and relevance to youth-lived experiences. Brief pre- and post-surveys were conducted with youth participants for process and impact measures. Youth participants received a Mindful Matters grab bag with various items to support well-being.

Together, “Dr. Selena”, as the youth warmly called her, along with her daughter Micah, created warm and inviting spaces where the youth felt encouraged to:

- » Discuss their strengths and stressors while prioritizing mental well-being
- » Identify self-care strategies
- » Apply mental health coping mechanisms and resilience skills
- » List community resources to support youth mental health and well-being



**Taking care of you,  
is the best thing to do**

### » Training Results

- » From July – August 2024, 138 Florida youth participated in a Mindful Matters training session
- » 117 youth completed a pre-training survey, and 88 youth completed a post-training survey
- » Of those who completed a post-training survey, 89% were satisfied with the training, and 79% felt they learned something from the training
- » 77% of youth reported that the Mindful Matters Session provided them with information that helps them deal with everyday challenges
- » 88% of youth said they would recommend a Mindful Matters Session to other youth
- » 86% of youth recounted a mental health resource they learned about in the session
- » 29% of youth learned about 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline after Mindful Matters

Participants stated they learned about the following resources: 988 suicide prevention and crisis lifeline, it’s ok to ask for help, art, positive affirmations and thoughts, breathing, self-care, walking, dancing, play, self-love, outdoors activities, gardening, prayer and spirituality, aromatherapy, and virtual supports.

### » Participant Demographics

- » Participants were 71.8% female, 24.8% male, and 3.5% transgender or non-binary / third gender
- » Almost one in four participants (23.1%) identified as Hispanic / Latino, and 59.8% identified as Black or African American

EMPOWERING  
Resources For All

