



Chester Eastside, Inc Racial Equity Strategy

Chester, Pennsylvania is a city of about 42,000 people. It occupies 4.8 square miles with a low-income people of color population, located 15 miles south of Philadelphia in the affluent, mostly white Delaware County. It is the site of an unprecedented cluster of industrial polluting facilities, health issues, high crime, and a deteriorating education system.

Chester has been home to a trash incinerator that handles waste from the entire county, a sewage treatment plant that still receives much of the county's sewage, and numerous other waste processing plants, oil refineries, and industrial polluters. Essentially, the low-income, black community of Chester has been forced to live amidst the waste of the more affluent, white towns and cities around it.

This exposure creates significant health inequities for the residents of Chester. This includes an increased likelihood of asthma, lung cancer, and colorectal cancer. When compared to other residents of Pennsylvania, Chester residents are 50% more likely to die from cerebrovascular disease, 64% more likely to develop ovarian cancer, 24% more likely to die from heart disease, and 24% more likely to develop lung cancer¹. These environmental factors leading to health disparities are coupled with the challenges of education, crime, and other social factors requiring intervention.

The Chester-Upland school district consists of 6 schools serving grades PK-12. The enrollment is approximately 2,621 students with a teacher ratio of 13:1. The minority enrollment is 99%. The graduation rate is 74%, math proficiency of 7%, reading proficiency of 23%, and has a district ranking of the bottom 50% according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) ².

These environmental, health, and education challenges are a fraction of the disparities that are sustained by historical legacies and structures and systems that repeat patterns of exclusion. This daunting reality requires a collective approach to equity for all.

Chester Eastside Inc. (CEI) was founded with the sole purpose of bridging the disparity gaps experienced by inner-city residents as a result of inequity in our society. Our commitment has been to battle food insecurities, educational and societal inequity. This has manifested in our core services of a food pantry, youth education programming, and various social services.

Our commitment is to provide services which directly address the health, education, and social disparities in Chester through a three-fold process of programming, operations, and advocacy. Our approach began with assessments of needs which inform each area of programming. Each area has a set of challenges being addressed and ongoing goals and measurement.

Programming

Our primary programming includes providing food through our pantry, education through our Phoenix education initiatives, and social needs through health and legal services partnerships.

Food

The food pantry has continued to increase the distribution of food and those served. The challenge continues to improve the quality of food provided. To this end, CEI has leveraged its own garden and partnerships to increase the access and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. Our hope is to continue this pantry and reinstitute the Food Matters program focused on healthy eating to influence and healthy outcomes.

Goals – Increase distribution among the growing ethnic population (e.g., Hispanic and Latin America descent)

Increase the quality of food, access and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables

Measurement – Monthly tracking of bag distribution, families served (children, adults, and seniors).

Education

The Phoenix program continues to serve children through both the out-of-school and summer camps. Both programs target increased exposure and customized support. The exposure through cultural, arts, and educational experiences not afforded in their school system. The customized support includes consistent tutoring supporting all academic needs.

Goals – To provide enriched academic and cultural experiences to children participating in after school and summer camp programs.

Measurement – Number of children who increase reading (not grade) level and math skills from beginning of fall to end of spring sessions. Number and type of cultural activities and percentage of children participating.

Health and legal services

Through partnerships, we have created an opportunity for those we serve to receive health and legal services. There is a mini-clinic setup to service the health needs of those in need. Once a month a legal expert comes to provide aid to anyone in need.

Goals – To provide convenient access to health and legal services for all in need. To increase awareness of these services to the community we serve. To equip or staff and volunteers to identify needs and facilitate the awareness and access of services.

Measurement – Track the number of participants using the services.

Additional programming

Supporting the ongoing challenge of voter registration, CEI partnered to distribute voter registration literature in both English and Spanish through the pantry, and out of school time

programs. In an effort to improve quality of life various seasonal programming was done. This included thanksgiving baskets, holiday celebrations, bazaar, and gift cards distributed.

Operations

Our operations continue to mature and grow. We have intentionally selected, equipped, and held ourselves accountable to consistently improve our impact. CEI is led by an experienced leader with a commitment to social justice and equity. This current leadership is consistent with the passion of those first leading CEI with the added experience and capability to take us to the next levels of excellence. Our leader is supported by a staff focused on programming and operations experience that has prospered our organization. This operations staff has ensured that we bring efficiencies, quality, while increasing our effectiveness. The team leads a group of committed volunteers. This team of staff and volunteers are supported by a diverse, mission-minded, and committed board. This board has flexed their talent to help where needed in support of the organization's leader. The approach of both staff, volunteers, and board is to run CEI as a center of excellence in the community.

Advocacy

CEI has evolved from a single entity solving insurmountable issue to a convener partnering towards equity. This underlying approach has aided our growth and effectiveness from distributing food to fighting food insecurities; from providing a safe haven for children to breaking the school to prison pipeline; and from dying in Chester to thriving. We hold ourselves to a high standard that is ever-growing in hopes of overcoming the disparities of our city affecting our people.

Adopted by the Chester Eastside, Inc. Board of Directors

February 2023

References

¹University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine Center for Excellence in Environmental Toxicology (CEET). (2020). Retrieved from <https://ceet.upenn.edu/target-communities/chester/>

²Review, P. S. (2023). *Chester-Upland School District Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/pennsylvania/chester-upland-school-district/4205860-school-district>