

Key Strategic Partnerships Create Greater Impact and Build More Resilient Communities!

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The Sussex County Health Coalition has been in existence for over 15 years in Sussex County, Delaware. With over 175 member organizations and over 400 members who support the work we do, we understand and value partnership.¹ Our mission is to “engage the entire community in collaborative family-focused effort to improve the health of children, youth, and families in Sussex County.”¹ This is no easy undertaking given that Sussex County, Delaware is the one of the largest rural counties east of the Mississippi.² Sussex County hosts a high rate of children living at or below the poverty level and has a limited pipeline of workforce opportunities that provide a livable wage. When this is coupled with significant provider shortages in key health and wellness areas, social and health issues become prevalent. These large-scale public health and social problems are best addressed through strategic partnerships and shared resourcing. The Delaware Division of Libraries is one of the main strategic partnerships that allows the SCHC to make progress on reducing these major social and health issues.

The Sussex County Health Coalition is extremely grateful for the ability to partner with several anchor institutions in Sussex County. However, most do not have the extensive reach, resources, and place-based services as compared to libraries in helping build a more resilient community. Public libraries provide to our organization and our partners a trusted community-based venue in which a citizen can access information and support both in person and virtually. The local libraries in our state and across the nation have become the go-to community centers through their open and inclusive approach and have elevated community services and supports as a top priority. The ways in which the library has provided us – and our partners – support includes: information dissemination, public education, family support services, workforce training, individual growth, and partner support. Our organization has utilized the reach of the libraries in Sussex County to inform the public on upcoming webinars, screenings, food distributions and community activities. They have also provided us with meeting space to offer classes through our partners on nutrition, diabetes, stress reduction, child development, addiction, grief and more. In addition, they are working alongside of us and many others to ensure literacy for young children and adults through Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and Literacy Delaware, respectively.³ The libraries bridge social isolation amongst our community’s elderly along with establishing support groups for others seeking connection on a myriad of issues. During Covid-19, the libraries stepped up to ensure many of our residents have access to the internet, making every location a virtual hub. Libraries offer a partnership opportunity that is timely, responsive, engaged and directive; this is directly aligned with the mission of the SCHC which recognizes the importance of partnership and collaboration.

Population health is complex with a myriad of social determinants that contribute to poor health outcomes. SCHC alongside our partner, Delaware Libraries, are on the front lines deploying the resources directly to our citizens and our collaborative partners who seek their support. The library system reaches over 1,000,000 people in our state which aids to combat these negative health outcomes and, in turn, generate positive social and health results.³ SCHC will continue to link partners into our local libraries and align our work alongside of them.

We would recommend that other organizational partners engage the library system in their work as well. Utilizing larger systems like SCHC and the library partnership can help your organization deliver your services to broader populations more efficiently.

“Creating impact takes many hands pulling together in the same direction on the same lines.”

I would argue the Delaware Library Consortium in and of itself is a collective impact model. This creates a system that any organization can participate in which adds to greater social impact for our citizens and their community. Look to your local library to address social determinants of health issues and find real world solutions for our communities in real time. Delaware libraries are more than checking out a book, it is about helping to support and nurture lives.

References

1. Sussex County Health Coalition. (2019). About us. Retrieved from <https://www.sussexcoalition.org/schc/about-us/>
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3. Division of Libraries. (2020, August 19). About. Retrieved from <https://libraries.delaware.gov/about-libraries/>

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