

COMMUNITY HEALTH INNOVATIONS OF RHODE ISLAND

While healthcare resources in RI are robust, where we live, learn, work and play are the major contributors to our health. Your zip code may be more important than your genetic code. Literacy, language, and culture can be barriers to navigating health and human services necessary for optimal health. In 2011, public health researcher, Dr. Dannie Ritchie, founded Community Health Innovations Rhode Island (CHI-RI) to check the pulse of communities and improve health equity. One way CHI-RI does this is to train community members as community health workers (CHWs). “Natural helping systems have existed in all human communities throughout history,” said Dannie. “Our efforts to formalize the CHW model is due to the understanding that CHWs provide community members with culturally relevant health education, social support, and serve as ambassadors to the healthcare system and policy makers.”

The SEG Network Effect

Dannie worked extensively with SEG Advisor, Rob Panoff, to solidify her business model, which relies upon key partnerships with community organizations serving their target populations, such as Clinica Esperanza and the Department of Health’s Health Equity Zone (HEZ). These partners help identify and connect prospective students for CHI-RI’s courses and workshops, and Dannie provides the curriculum and management.

Dannie also worked with Rob to create a one-pager the organization could use to communicate what they do. “Rob’s language has helped us articulate what we do to various stakeholders,” said Dannie. “The communications strategy is so important because we work on many levels from community through to policy and research, all in order to maximize impact and create equity,” she said, “Policy creates the conditions and we need to start where the community is at so they know we need and hear them.”



Pictured is the Department of Health HEZ CHW Cohort at the Minority Health Month event at the State House. Representative Grace Diaz, who defines herself as a community health worker, works with Dannie to declare April Community Health Worker Month. The CHWs were all given citations on the House Floor.

Clínica Esperanza / Hope Clinic (CEHC) operates as a free clinic for uninsured, predominantly Spanish speaking patients. In 2016 alone, the clinic served 2,500 patients with the help of 6 Clinical Health Worker (CHW) Navegantes, community members trained by CHI-RI. They provide outreach, health education, and interpretation for diet, behavioral changes, medication adherence, and diagnostic tests.

With CHI-RI, four of the RI Department of Health HEZs trained CHWs in community based organizations. Working with partners in their communities has increased the capacities of their communities to address challenge, and improve the communities’ health.