



## Charleston, WV

▲ Community Example from Chapter 1 of “Lessons for Leaders:”  
*Lessons in Community Capacity Building*

### Community Background

KEYS 4 HealthyKids (KEYS) was a multi-sector partnership led by Jamie Jeffrey, MD, a pediatrician and medical director of a pediatric obesity program, and Judy Crabtree, the Executive Director of Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement. Although the partners felt they had a good understanding of childhood obesity in their respective settings—clinics, child-care agencies, churches, recreation centers and schools—they had not evaluated the community as a whole to identify barriers to and opportunities for healthy eating and active living. To help prioritize and refine their proposed HKHC strategies, the KEYS partnership’s first aim was to better understand the issue through multiple lenses.

### Community Action

KEYS partners conducted a variety of assessment activities to gauge residents’ perspectives, partners’ preferences, availability of health food in retail stores and safe opportunities for physical activity. For example, the Kanawha County Health Department led partners in conducting 30 walkability and bikeability audits in low-income Charleston neighborhoods. Other assessment activities included community forums to hear residents’ views on the challenges they face in eating healthy foods and staying physically active. KEYS partners used assessment results to identify strategic priorities, and they helped the partners develop surveying and public facilitation skills. The process ultimately built a deeper understanding among community members and leaders by sparking a public dialogue about obesity being more than a medical concern.

Youth development was an important outcome, as was their real contribution to the city leaders. The KEYS Youth Council, a group of middle school students hosted by the YMCA of Greater Charleston, actively helped the partnership assess conditions in Charleston through the eyes of its young residents. The youth used Photovoice and observational surveys while conducting an inventory of physical activity opportunities and food sources on the West Side and East End neighborhoods of Charleston.

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After establishing some experience and credibility, the KEYS Youth Council helped the City Council’s Parks and Recreation Committee assess all city parks to prioritize future improvements. During a summary presentation to the committee, the youth recommended adding playground equipment and removing obstacles to safe and active play. They also suggested hosting activity nights to increase public awareness and activate the parks. The KEYS Youth Council’s assessments developed new skills in the young people, deepened their understanding of healthy eating and active living, and built their confidence in presenting results to city officials. The Charleston Council and Parks Department ultimately followed their recommendations when prioritizing park maintenance and capital improvements.