



REACHING RICHMOND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

The Reaching Richmond Community Collaborative (RRCC) is dedicated to building community conditions that support the mental health and wellbeing of youth and families across North Richmond, a suburb of the Greater Houston area. Since 2019, RRCC has sought to improve community safety, increase access to green space, plan cultural celebrations, and more.

The collaborative brings families, youth leaders, resident leaders, and community-based organizations together and is coordinated by AccessHealth, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) that provides services to low-income populations in Fort Bend and Waller Counties. The collaborative's partner network has grown over time to include organizations such as Friends of North Richmond, Nery's Promise, and the Richmond-Rosenberg Boys & Girls Club. Throughout all of its initiatives and collaborative efforts, Reaching Richmond builds upon the strengths of resident leaders and increases community pride.

Reaching Richmond has engaged North Richmond's Latine and Black residents to uplift them as the driving voices in their community. Palak Jalan, Chief Operations Officer at AccessHealth, observed that "when this project started, the goal was to have representation. But the resident engagement has truly taken

center stage for our collaborative, where the partners are playing a supportive role, but the residents are themselves playing a leadership role."

RRCC has developed unique strategies for building resident leadership and community engagement that have led to tangible changes in the city.

RICHMOND RESIDENTS TAKE THE LEAD

RRCC's unique approach to building community agency involves a group of adult resident leaders called "Street Captains." This model was inspired by the Richmond Police Department's approach of dedicating officers to serve as community relationship partners in specific parts of the city. The current 15 Street Captains are all trusted community residents whom others can approach with safety concerns or requests for help. Since 2020, a total of 50 community leaders have served as Street Captains.

A structured recruitment, onboarding, and ongoing training approach helps keep RRCC's Street Captains prepared to serve their community. Word of mouth among existing Street Captains and visibility at community



THE NORTH RICHMOND COMMUNITY IN RICHMOND, TEXAS,

is a historically rich and culturally vibrant area influenced by the resilience of its Black and Latine residents. Formerly known as Mud Alley, this area was once segregated, with minority-owned shops and homes physically separated from the predominantly white-owned businesses across the railroad tracks. Over time, the BIPOC community in North Richmond has faced disinvestment in the form of limited access to green spaces and healthy foods, among other resources. However, efforts to transform community conditions through government, nonprofit organizations, and community-led efforts are resulting in improved infrastructure that will enhance resident wellbeing.



DWANETTE JACKSON, FORMER STREET CAPTAIN

“Growing up here, there were no organizations that stood out and tried to help this community because the same issues have been going on for so many generations. And for this organization to come along and advocate for things that should have been here a long time ago was amazing to me. So it drew me in right then and there because they were like, “Hey, they’re trying to do something for this place.” And why not step in? Because I have young children that one day, when I’m not here, they’ll be here.”

events and meetings raise awareness of the opportunity to become a Street Captain and generate interest among residents who hope to make a difference in North Richmond. Social media engagement further amplifies the achievements and successes of RRCC’s Street Captain program to draw in new leaders. Street Captain Vice President Maria Rodriguez oversees a formal onboarding process that includes an orientation with training on advocacy and mentorship between existing and new Street Captains.

A new committee system allows the Street Captains to take on leadership roles within the Reaching Richmond collaborative and focus on a particular health and safety priority. For instance, the transportation committee has presented to Fort Bend County transit leadership, and the healthy food committee has influenced corner stores to sell and display more fresh fruit.

This group of resident leaders is truly a team—they support each other when challenges arise and fill in for each other’s roles when needed. Street Captains work collaboratively alongside the RRCC’s organizational partners to help youth and families in their neighborhoods thrive.

YOUTH LEADERS ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

In 2022, RRCC expanded its Street Captain model to include youth positions— the Junior Street Captain Council. This initiative has emboldened nine youth as early as ten years old from schools across Richmond to take on leadership roles and actively participate in advocacy efforts. Through the recent establishment of a youth council, the Junior Street Captains have brought energy and a fresh perspective on issues impacting youth and families.

Youth participants received advocacy training from Alison Boleware, Director of Policy at the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, on skills such as professional communication and testifying in front of elected officials. This training opportunity has already been fruitful, as the Junior Street Captains contributed to several policy efforts in recent years.



In October 2022, they worked with adult Street Captains to lobby for improved streetlights where they were missing and posed a safety concern. Additionally, Junior Street Captains have presented ideas for enhancements to park spaces to the city’s Parks and Recreation Board, shared ideas to address

speed limits near schools with city officials, and have worked to expand community gardens at local schools.

RRCC continues pursuing training opportunities that build young people's advocacy capacity. By integrating youth leadership into its model, Reaching Richmond is nurturing the next generation of community leaders and ensuring that the voices of young residents help drive decisions in the collaborative's ongoing efforts to enhance community conditions.

BUILDING CONNECTION TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY WELLBEING

RRCC's innovative Street Captain and Junior Street Captain Councils have significantly improved communication and trust within the community. They have created space for vibrant cultural celebrations that strengthen social bonds— an effort that makes strides toward improving community members' mental wellbeing.

Street Captains host a series of block parties and events that enrich the community's cultural landscape. For instance, the "Black is Beautiful" block party, organized by Street Captain Dwanette Jackson, celebrated Black history with fun activities, cultural food, and stories of inspiring historical figures. Another event, the Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration in September 2023, was attended by 150 community members and provided much-needed recognition of the community's majority Latine population and history.

Other recurring events organized by residents have focused more directly on health and safety, such as a wellness walk, annual Family Fun Run, and block party, which provided resources on water safety and mental health tools and featured outdoor activities, including water games. Importantly, these events have been an opportunity to encourage residents, youth, and families to participate in outdoor activities and be active.

In addition to building connections with organizational partners and decision-makers, one of the most profound impacts has been RRCC's role in fostering trust among neighbors. Community members share that they are connected with neighbors and find themselves more comfortable communicating concerns with their street captains than in the past. The street captains effectively liaise with collaborative partners, city officials, and other decision-makers, expressing the health and safety priorities that they hear from residents.



**SHIRLEY FERNANDEZ,
COMMUNITY HEALTH
MANAGER AT ACCESSHEALTH:**

"I have recently joined the Collaborative and have been inspired by the dedication these community members have to improve their community. I am honored to be a part of a project so innovative and driven and I am excited to be able to contribute to the positive transformation of North Richmond!"



SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING RRCC'S SUCCESS

As RRCC continues building community connection, cultural pride, and safety, organizations in and beyond Richmond with similar missions are interested in partnership opportunities. In recent months, new RRCC partners include FIT Fort Bend and Lone Star Schools. As part of their strategy to build safety, RRCC has engaged police departments in Richmond and beyond to influence their policies to include community voice; the potential for relationship and trust building with the police department continues to be explored as one strategy for addressing safety concerns.

Collaborative leaders have heard about interest in the Street Captain model from organizations in the region and the police department in the city of Eagle Pass. RRCC hopes it can help other regions replicate their approach.

When considering the future of Reaching Richmond's impact on the community, former collaborative coordinator and current member Regina Garza comments on her continued desire for resident leadership and ownership of the initiative, as well as her vision for increased resident involvement in local government bodies.

"Hopefully, [Street Captains] will be more of the leaders, more of the owners of this collaborative moving forward in North Richmond with what we're doing. We're already moving in that direction, as they're feeling more comfortable, and they're ready to have more leadership roles," she says. "I can see us in the future, with the street captains or residents or youth coming together with [city officials] and really planning together." RRCC has seen the fruits of building resident leadership capacity, as it has a collaborative member now serving on the city's Parks and Recreation board.

The Reaching Richmond Community Collaborative's ongoing work to build resident power, engage youth in advocacy, develop relationships with city agencies, and create greater social cohesion are all part of their comprehensive approach to charting a path for a more healthy, resilient, and equitable Richmond.



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