

Leveraging a Community's Talents and Resources to Build Health

SOAR
2017

Residents Recognize and Mobilize Their Local Assets

INITIATIVE	Strengthening Our Area Residents (SOAR)
LOCATION	Towns of Galen and Savannah, and the Village of Clyde
YEAR LAUNCHED	2013
AFFILIATION	Cornell Cooperative Extension of Wayne County
ONLINE	www.facebook.com/SOARWayneCounty
PEOPLE SERVED	Approximately 8,063 residents of the towns of Galen and Savannah, and the Village of Clyde



SOAR is a network of residents, organizations, businesses, and other collaborators working together to improve the health and well-being of their communities, promote economic development, and beautify their surroundings. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Wayne County administers the program, and residents of the Towns of Galen, Town of Savannah and the Village of Clyde create projects and inspire each other.



A RESIDENT-DRIVEN PROGRAM

The residents of the Town of Galen, the Town of Savannah and the Village of Clyde are working to implement a grassroots, community-driven plan to create new opportunities for health improvement. The initiative is called SOAR – Strengthening Our Area Residents.

Even with the natural beauty of southeast Wayne County, N.Y., with towns nestled between scenic wetlands and a stretch of the historic Erie Canal, residents lack some resources needed to live a healthy lifestyle. For example, access to health care can be a challenge, healthy food and opportunities for physical activity are not available to everyone, and limited employment opportunities can make it difficult for families to make ends meet.

To address these challenges, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Wayne County collaborated with the Greater Rochester Health Foundation in 2013 to launch SOAR.

A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

SOAR promotes multiple activities to improve the local economic scene, enhance social connections among neighbors, and create healthy, beautiful spaces where residents can enjoy physical activity. Each activity targets a shared goal: community health improvement.

VITAL LINK: ECONOMY & HEALTH

A strong economy is linked to improved health status, and SOAR has worked to capitalize on assets to encourage local business. A depressed local economy motivated residents to explore

opportunities to replace the dwindling agricultural and industrial work and to try to create jobs that enable residents, especially young adults, to remain in the community and raise their families. Local attractions including the Montezuma Audubon Center, the extensive Montezuma Wetlands Complex, and the historic Erie Canal, draw tourists to the area throughout the year.

SOAR is collaborating with local, regional, state, and federal agencies to give visitors reasons to stop in the towns and villages. As part of this effort, the community is restoring properties and promoting the development of small local businesses in an effort to stimulate economic activity.

HEALTHY SPACES: HEALTHY LIFE

The abundant outdoor areas in the area served by SOAR naturally encourage physical activity. To take advantage, a number of initiatives have been put in place.

- A collaboration among area residents, businesses, municipalities, and organizations is helping to convert the West Shore Trail, an old railroad bed, into a trail. An offshoot of the larger New York Trailway System, this effort includes installation of picnic tables, grills, a campground, and a mural.
- Residents successfully advocated for the Town of Savannah to take ownership of ball fields at an old elementary school, leaving the former school buildings for future redevelopment. Working with Cornell Cooperative Extension and a “Design Connect” team from Cornell University, SOAR crafted plans to redesign the land into a multi-use recreational field. The plan includes a walking trail, playground spaces, and outdoor exercise machines.

- In collaboration with the Savannah Chamber of Commerce, SOAR launched the Savannah Arts Festival in 2015 at the Montezuma Audubon Center. The event featured an art and photography contest and live local music. In 2016 a fun run and art classes were added. Inspired by the positive response, SOAR will include arts-oriented events as a regular part of its calendar.
- At the Clyde Farmer’s Market, SOAR educates children and families on the fundamentals of nutrition. Using the Power of Produce (POP) program, children learn about the local food system through conversations with farmers, educational games and demonstrations, and opportunities to try new fruits and vegetables.
- SOAR collaborated with the Clyde SPAN organization to provide healthy cooking demonstrations, yoga classes, bird watching tours, and walking activities. Clyde SPAN has organized social gatherings such as “Beat the Blahs” night and “Harmony in the Park” to bring people together and create a sense of belonging to the community.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION: LITERACY IS KEY

SOAR’s sustained emphasis on young residents’ education has led to one of its most successful initiatives. “The Bright Red Bookshelf” project encourages families to read to their kids by providing free books at accessible community locations. More than 4,000 books have been given away and the development of a “Babies Belong at the Library” effort supports reading at even earlier ages. The reading projects are designed to break down barriers to literacy and lay the groundwork for strong educational outcomes in the future.

CONTACT:



To learn more about SOAR, contact Project Coordinator Sandi Bastedo at (315) 331-8415 or email sb932@cornell.edu

To find out more about the Greater Rochester Health Foundation’s Neighborhood Health Status Improvement initiative, contact Program Officer Maynor Gonzalez at (585) 258-1703 or mgonzalez@thegrhf.org



From Theory to Practice

People’s daily lives affect their health in countless ways – from the sense of safety and connection to neighbors, to the availability of healthy food, to access to green space and fresh air. And when a neighborhood is inspired to improve from the inside out by building on their strengths rather than dwelling on needs, they can realize improved physical, social and economic health.

That’s the premise of a grant program introduced by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation in 2008, which ultimately funded SOAR. The Neighborhood Health Status Improvement initiative supports grassroots efforts to improve the health of people living in neighborhoods challenged by poverty and environmental factors.

Following a year-long assessment of their neighborhood, each grantee brought together residents to implement locally-based plans developed by the neighborhood itself. Each plan included a vision for a healthier future built on the assets they already have in their community.

The Greater Rochester Health Foundation partners with an expert in asset-based community development who provides ongoing technical support for the initiative, and two evaluators who work directly with grantees to ensure that evidence is gathered to support both process improvement and long-term project objectives.

Do you have an idea that you’d like to share? Contact us to see how, together, we might be able to help it take flight!