



Yesler Terrace Seattle, Washington

Executive Summary

This site profile is part of a series that spotlights mixed-income community transformations that emphasize health and wellness in their strategic interventions. The Mixed-Income Strategic Alliance produced these profiles to better understand the health implications of creating thriving and inclusive communities with a socioeconomically and racially diverse population. This site profile, which focuses on Yesler Terrace, was developed through interviews with local stakeholders as well as a review of publicly-available and internal documents.

Yesler Terrace is a mixed-income community in Seattle, Washington that is slated to have over 5,000 new and replacement units when complete. Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) received a Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant in 2012, and construction is still ongoing for much of the site, with acceleration in the years to come of privately developed market-rate housing on site.

The Yesler Terrace Choice Neighborhoods effort is guided by Yesler Terrace Guiding Principles: social equity, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship and sustainability, and one-for-one replacement housing. These principles undergird an overall redevelopment plan that calls for extensive community redevelopment in each of Choice Neighborhoods' three key focus areas of people, neighborhood, and housing. While the "People" portion of the Yesler plan is particularly focused on education, including deep partnerships with educational agencies and institutions at all levels, SHA's plan also focuses on health, with multiple strands of activities, ranging from construction that facilitates healthier respiratory functioning, to Community Health Workers, to resident-led clubs and activities aimed at healthier lifestyles.

Two strategies in particular are already having positive impacts at Yesler. First, Community Health Workers (CHW), employed early as part of the Choice Neighborhoods implementation plan, have made a notable impact on Yesler residents' lives through connecting residents to health services, assisting residents in signing up for health care, helping residents navigate the social service system, and acting as strong social supports. Second, the community building strategies at Yesler Terrace have led to a noticeable increase in resident leadership, resident self-sufficiency, and a sense of resident ownership and pride in the community. The creation and support of a new Community Builder position was a critical part in making and sustaining this shift.

Future mixed-income sites that seek to create equitable, inclusive communities should look to Yesler Terrace for important lessons from the redevelopment process so far. First, Yesler Terrace demonstrates the challenge of balancing the requirements of Choice Neighborhoods grants with meeting the health and well-being needs of socioeconomically and racially diverse residents. Second, the intensive and intentional community-building efforts at Yesler Terrace are providing an instructive example about how to create the conditions for a healthy and inclusive community. As residents of varied income brackets continue to move in, Yesler Terrace stakeholders and community members have the opportunity to refine these strategies and develop a proactive approach that leverages the future social mix to improve residents' health outcomes across the income spectrum. Finally, SHA and its partners demonstrate the importance of starting a community-driven planning and implementation process early and of maintaining and "institutionalizing" it in order to spark authentic community engagement.



Background & Context

Yesler Terrace in Seattle, Washington, is the largest mixed-income redevelopment in the nation. When finished, it will include over 5000 new and replacement units and, with its location close to downtown Seattle, it will be a highly visible and closely tracked example of mixed-income community redevelopment in a city and region where issues of affordable housing, displacement of low-income residents, and income and wealth disparities are top-of-mind for policymakers, politicians, and the public alike.

For years, Yesler Terrace was one of the poorest communities in Seattle, with residents' incomes at less than

30% of the city's median. With construction completed in 1941, Yesler was Seattle's first publicly subsidized housing community and the first racially integrated public housing development in the nation. Located just east of downtown Seattle, Yesler has long been close to employment centers and amenities, although its residents have historically been economically isolated. The Yesler Terrace community is racially and culturally diverse. Major language and cultural communities represented include: East African (Amharic, Oromo, Somali, Tigrigna); Asian (Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese), and Spanish. Many residents are foreign-born and face unique challenges as immigrants living in a rapidly changing neighborhood and city.¹

Site Redevelopment

SHA's original visioning about redevelopment for Yesler Terrace in 2006 was prompted by severely deteriorated infrastructure and increasingly unhealthy living conditions. SHA convened a number of meetings and conversations with residents of Yesler Terrace and the surrounding community, with city officials, and with other stakeholders and potential partners to develop a shared future vision for the site. Through this process, SHA successfully institutionalized community engagement and input by creating the Citizen Review Committee (CRC), which serves both as a vehicle to involve residents and community partners in Yesler Terrace-related decision-making and as an accountability mechanism for guiding the redevelopment process. Still vital today, the CRC is comprised of Yesler Terrace residents, residents of the surrounding neighborhood, and governmental, private sector, and community stakeholders engaged in the site's redevelopment. CRC's resident members are selected by the Yesler Terrace Community Council (the resident council), and other members are part of affordable housing and smart growth/sustainability organizations, city agencies, and service providers.

The CRC established the core values that have guided Yesler Terrace's redevelopment project over the last decade, including:

- **Social equity:** Meeting essential needs and improving the quality of life through access to employment, education, medical care, social services, nutritious food, and quality affordable housing.
- **Economic opportunity:** Fostering access to jobs, transportation, community services, and safe low-income affordable housing and financial tools.
- **Environmental stewardship and sustainability:** Integrating sustainable design and implementing equitable environmental and economic practices while preserving housing affordability.
- **One-for-one replacement housing:** Replace or

Yesler Terrace Unit Mix and Relocation

When complete, the Yesler Terrace site will house families, single occupants, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, and each of the buildings that are being privately developed (i.e., market-rate rental housing) will include units intended to preserve an income mix and available for tenants earning up to 60% or 80% AMI. The proposed income mix laid out in the original development plan for Yesler Terrace called for:

- Less than 30% AMI: 665 units (public housing replacement and increase from 561 original units)
- Less than 60% AMI: 338 units
- Less than 80% AMI: up to 949 units
- Market-Rate: up to 3200 units

At the end of 2017, much construction progress had been made and a total of 476 housing units had been completed. Against the original plan:

- 39% of replacement units were complete
- 21% of "up to 60% AMI" units were complete
- 4 % of "up to 80% of AMI" units were complete
- 5 % of market rate units were complete

At the end of 2018, approximately 1900 housing units were in various stages of planning, design, and construction.

Seattle Housing Authority and partners handled resident relocation and return carefully and conscientiously. Relocation occurred in phases so that the community could remain functioning while redevelopment took place. While all residents were informed of the redevelopment plans from the outset of the project, relocation deadlines for each phase were also announced a full 18 months in advance to allow ample time for counseling and decisionmaking. The original public housing residents were given priority for the replacement units, and all moving costs were covered by SHA, whether residents choose to move directly to a new unit, or decide to relocate away and then later choose to move back. For example, in 2017, 16 households returned to Yesler Terrace after moving off-site several years prior. Overall, 20% of households who relocated offsite since 2012 have returned.

In addition, relocation was planned to minimize disruption to residents' lives as much as possible. Families with school children were offered opportunities to schedule their relocation when school was not in session. Due to the pattern of construction, the majority of Yesler Terrace residents had the option of continuing to live onsite while replacement housing was built, thus promoting a high level of resident retention and allowing the community to continue to thrive during redevelopment. All (100%) of households who wished to stay at Yesler Terrace during redevelopment have been able to do so.

exceed the current number of very-low-income and low-income housing units at Yesler Terrace that serve public-housing-eligible residents and provide choice, options, site integration, and affordability in a dense and culturally and economically diverse community.

In 2012, SHA received a Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant that provided the funding necessary for redevelopment to begin. Staying true to its commitment to intensive community engagement, SHA collaborated with the CRC, the Yesler Community Council, and development partners to guide implementation of the grant, which runs through 2019.

Key Actors/Stakeholders

SHA's key partners for the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant include the Yesler Citizen Review Committee, the Yesler Terrace Community Council, NeighborCare Health, Seattle University, the City of Seattle, a number of local community organizations and nonprofits, and several national foundations. NeighborCare Health, a Seattle-based health care provider that focuses on serving low-income communities, was a key partner that implemented the Community Health Worker program (described below) at Yesler Terrace, hiring four Yesler Terrace residents as CHWs to better connect residents with primary care and health-related activities.

Funding

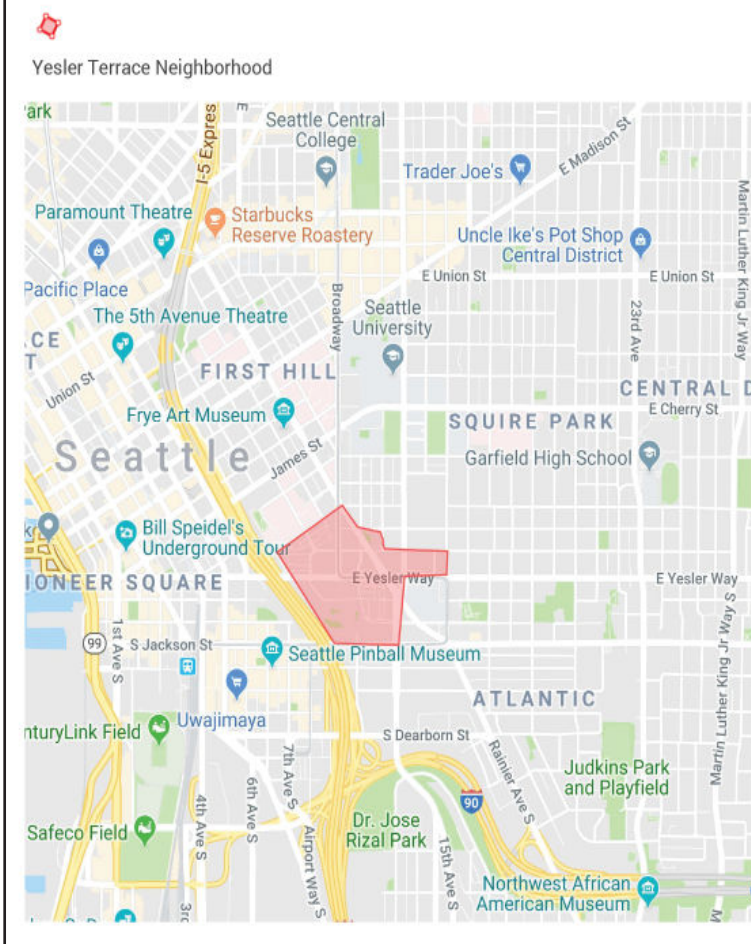
Core funding for Yesler's redevelopment has come from the Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant. In addition, significant funding for redevelopment and for the People and Neighborhood elements of the comprehensive plan have come from diverse public and private sector sources, and foundations such as JP Morgan Chase, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Seattle Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.²

Design & Implementation of Strategies

Conceptualization of Key Health Strategies

As SHA approached the redevelopment of Yesler Terrace, leaders took into account the lessons learned from previous HOPE VI redevelopment processes in Seattle, particularly from experience with the redevelopment of

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the High Point, Rainier Vista, and New Holly communities. Understanding that high-quality, safe, and healthy housing for residents was a minimum starting point, SHA aimed to go “above and beyond the four walls” of the residential units and buildings to ensure that the original Yesler Terrace residents did not get left behind in the process of visioning and redevelopment.

For that reason, planning and design of Yesler Terrace revitalization has been community-oriented since its origins. As mentioned previously, community input informed decisions around the use of physical space and the location of housing, and it helped shape the economic, education, social, and health priorities for the community. Early and continuing resident meetings and interviews surfaced community members' aspirations as well as fears and anxieties, and in particular contributed to decisions about how to impose the least amount of disruption to residents' lives. With the award of the Choice Neighborhoods funding, the CRC divided into three subcommittees to guide the three areas of focus: People, Neighborhood, and Housing. To further broaden the scope of input, SHA created a Policy and Program Manager position, a staff person tasked with gathering the various—and often disparate—perspectives and expect-

tations of different stakeholders. This thorough information-collection process led SHA to forge priorities that continue to guide redevelopment as Yesler nears the end of the term of the Choice Neighborhoods grant and SHA must plan for sustainability of the mixed-income community and for resident success. These priorities are:

- **Building Community/Effective Neighboring:** promoting a shared community identity, resident attachment to Yesler Terrace, stewardship of the Yesler Terrace community, and a strong sense of community cohesion.
- **Promoting Individual Social/Economic Mobility:** funding for adequate employment and education services, equitable access to transit and mobility services, and educational achievement of youth.
- **Promoting & Sustaining Mixed-Occupancy: recognizing** that Yesler Terrace is a diverse, mixed-income neighborhood and ensuring a culture of inclusion and a neighborhood that “feels safe.”

Health strategies are an important part of the Yesler Terrace redevelopment plan, but unlike some other mixed-income developments, they are not as explicitly highlighted in community priorities as they might be. Instead, education and economic mobility are prioritized, and while the description of the strategies in these areas is beyond the scope of this profile, the Yesler redevelopment has deep and sustained implementation strategies and partnerships in each of those areas. Health strategies are seen as vital components of assuring resident wellbeing and the strategies to advance them can be seen in each of the People (which includes education and economic mobility), Neighborhood, and Housing domains. Additional association of health and well-being with the Yesler community-building, economic well-being, and education strategies are not explicitly identified within a social determinants of health frame, but could more intentionally be. Currently, a team of evaluators that includes Public Health-Seattle and King County and Seattle Housing Authority is examining Yesler Terrace redevelopment strategies on resident well-being. Early results of this longitudinal evaluation indicates shifts in resident demographics, health outcomes, community social cohesion, and perception of safety measures.³

Key Health Strategies

Health Strategies in the People Domain

Community Health Workers

The Community Health Workers (CHW) are Yesler Terrace residents who are employed through NeighborCare Health and funded by the Choice grant to engage Yesler Terrace residents around health needs and supports. The four CHW function mainly as case navigators, providing health education information, connecting residents to appropriate services and accompanying them when

needed, as well as leading health and wellness activities for Yesler Terrace residents. Local leaders believe it is imperative that the CHW staff be community members so that they can speak their neighbors’ native languages and understand their cultural perspectives in order to communicate effectively with them, build trusting relationships, and directly assist at doctors’ appointments, with healthcare providers, and/or with navigating the social service system. The CHW also administer the annual Yesler Community Health Assessment survey. This assessment, required by the Choice Neighborhoods grant, collects data on the public housing residents living in Yesler Terrace related to health, household demographics, education, employment, and other aspects of the overall community.

A wide variety of health and wellness activities take place at Yesler Terrace, often organized and sometimes led by the CHW. Some of these activities include events at the Community Kitchen, gardening and working in the community gardens, after-school nutrition classes for youth and their mothers, and one-on-one health education through the Breathe Easy Program. In this program, residents have appointments with CHW to learn about how to protect their households from allergens, toxins, and pests, and receive free resources to help maintain a healthy, clean household. If there is a respiratory illness present in the household, Breathe Easy participants receive free mattress covers and pillowcases and HE-PA-filtered vacuums.

CHW, staff, and residents have also made it a priority to reduce social isolation for residents living at Yesler Terrace, seeing the clear linkages between social relationships and overall health and well-being. One activity that exemplifies these forged connections is a monthly Somali women’s social gathering that provides an opportunity to build relationships with one another and engage in shared activities of interest.

Community Building

Also as part of the People focus of the Yesler redevelopment, SHA hired a full-time Community Builder for Yesler Terrace. Conceived within a framework of asset-based community development, having this position as a visible and important part of the Yesler community elevates the importance of resident-driven community-building activities and helps make clear their connection to resident empowerment and self-sufficiency. In 2015, the Community Builder led an inclusive process with residents and stakeholders to develop the Yesler Terrace Community Building Network, which was created to *increase community capacity, foster neighborhood leadership, maximize resources, and facilitate meaningful socio-economic and cultural integration*.⁴ While the Community Building Network explicitly focuses on economic and educational opportunities, it also recognizes and incorporates important elements of other, more direct health interventions through supporting activities such

as community gardens and fitness clubs, and involving partners such as the nearby Harborview Medical Center and NeighborCare Health. Since 2015, the Community Builder has continued to build trust with the residents of Yesler Terrace, focusing on listening to their needs and utilizing their insight to create a more socially cohesive community.

Health Strategies in the Neighborhood Domain

Key neighborhood strategies for Yesler Terrace site redevelopment involve comprehensive plans related to physical site design beyond the new units. Underlying these neighborhood-level strategies is the understanding that transportation and the built environment are tied directly to health outcomes for residents. The SHA and its partners adopted site design principles that promote positive health outcomes, and these affected many of the primary redevelopment design decisions, ranging from the street grid, to improved connectivity and walkability throughout the development, and to the efforts to ensure Yesler Terrace access to surrounding neighborhoods.

Health Strategies in the Housing Domain

Health-related strategies within Yesler Terrace's housing plan involve environmentally friendly, sustainable, and efficient building techniques for SHA buildings.⁵ Most notably, the Breathe Easy Program (described previously) includes features such as energy-efficient ventilation installments, assuring low-pile carpeting in units, and providing low off-gassing paint and cabinetry. Additionally, all units are accessible by wheelchair, and there are currently over 40 fully-accessible units among Yesler Terrace's redeveloped SHA-supported buildings.

Measurement, Evaluation, & Outcomes

Local leaders report benefits from both of the health/health-related strategies described above. For example, SHA officials believe that the CHW have had a major impact on Yesler residents' physical and mental well-being. In particular, the CHW facilitate residents' signing up for health insurance and for medical appointments, helping residents take advantage of increased access to services made possible by implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). As a result of the CHW efforts, coupled with coverage under ACA, since 2014, more residents have reported seeing a health care provider for regular check-ups, with Harborview Medical Center and Swedish Medical Center as the primary locations for receiving care.⁶ The CHW have also helped break down the stigma of going to the doctor among immigrant populations in the community, an unanticipated but severe barrier to healthcare for many residents. CHW also encourage residents to break down doctor- and health-care-related stigma with their neighbors, acknowledging

that residents themselves are the best messengers to get positive messages about healthcare to their friends and neighborhoods—thus reducing or eliminating this barrier to care.

Similarly, SHA leaders report many positive benefits from their emphasis on community building—benefits that contribute to residents' overall healthy relationships and to their well-being. One sign of this is that, in the past, community-building efforts were solely led by the full-time Community Builder staff person. Today, that is much less true. The intensive community engagement that SHA promotes has led to a shift in many residents' thinking, according to SHA officials, with residents switching from "dependency mode" into a proactive mode where they initiate activities, host events, and become community leaders who feel ownership over their community. Examples of resident-led initiatives include chair aerobics, walking groups, and bingo. Interestingly, the resident-led bingo has resulted in an increased number of residents getting connected to ear and eye health services, as some residents were not able to hear the bingo numbers and letters being called out, or were having trouble reading the bingo cards.

In addition to these reported benefits, the annual Yesler Terrace Resident Survey indicates positive trends in some measures of well-being for many residents. The data from a summary of the Yesler Terrace Resident Survey from 2014 to 2017 show high rates of health insurance and contact with health providers, as follows:

- 96% of heads of households indicated they have health insurance
- 92% of residents living on-site have a primary health-care provider
- 45% of residents living on site considered their health to be good or excellent
- 94% of heads of households indicated Yesler was a safe place to live in 2017, up from 67% in 2015⁷

Key Takeaways

The redevelopment of Yesler Terrace is an ambitious, important, and consequential effort—one that is likely to forge new ground and provide long-lasting lessons about how mixed-income community redevelopment can help ensure and preserve affordable housing options while also creating inclusive, equitable communities. Health strategies are only one part of an overall redevelopment plan that gives highest and most visible priority to economic mobility, education, and community building (all of which are critical within a social determinants of health framework). Already, several lessons and takeaway from SHA's redevelopment of Yesler Terrace seem important.

Seattle Housing Authority and partners are demon-

strating the importance of starting a community-driven planning and implementation process early and of maintaining and “institutionalizing” it in order to spark authentic community engagement. The early, intentional, and sustained support of the Citizen Review Committee, the Yesler Community Council, and Yesler Terrace residents who wished to participate in revitalization efforts in a variety of ways has led to the production of services and activities that genuinely reflect the community’s needs and aspirations and ultimately promote a healthier community. Seattle Housing Authority can be looked to as a model for approaching redevelopment efforts with equity in mind, as equity is expressed by lifting up and being guided by the voices and views of people whose lives are most affected by the actions to be taken.

The intensive and intentional community-building efforts at Yesler Terrace are providing an instructive example about how to create the conditions for a healthy and inclusive community—and of course more will need to be done as the income mix in the community continues to change. To date, the impressive community-building strategies at Yesler Terrace have been focused primarily on the public housing residents, leading to positive outcomes such as fostering a sense of place, a positive “Yesler identity,” and a sense of empowerment among these residents. Having a designated, highly skilled, and purposeful Community Builder on site is integral to being able to develop an effective strategy to reach residents. Now, the Community Builder is thinking about how to engage residents in the non-SHA buildings and is beginning this work by engaging the property managers at the non-SHA buildings. Looking to the future, SHA, with the Community Builder in the lead, can be proactive in developing a community engagement strategy that engages market-rate residents and low-income residents. This seems to be the critical time for such a strategy to emerge, while market-rate residents are just now beginning to settle in to the community. This can help create the foundation for a truly cohesive community, where residents across the income spectrum feel part of a larger Yesler identity.

Finally, Yesler Terrace illustrates the challenge of meeting Choice Neighborhoods grant requirements while also planning for a site that will be home to residents from a range of incomes. Since SHA implemented the Choice Neighborhoods grant, there has been a positive shift in some measures of well-being for many residents on site. The funding from Choice Neighborhoods and subsequent leveraged funds afforded SHA and partners the opportunity to implement a comprehensive, impressive physical site revitalization accompanied by a range of health supports and regular collection of health-related data. Rightfully, under the Choice Neighborhoods funding requirements, the housing authority prioritized public housing residents and those living in the SHA-owned buildings for health initiatives, programming, and other supports. As the proportion of

market-rate housing grows at the site, SHA and partners now face the challenge of how to comparably attend to the health of new residents in the context of the whole community, envisioning and implementing strategies that extend health supports to residents living in subsidized units in mixed-income buildings and to market-rate residents themselves. There are few precedents for this comprehensive strategy, and SHA and Yesler Terrace may be creating new models in this area.

References

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- ⁷ Ibid.

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