



H  **PE**

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW



Health



In the summer of 2024 a health survey was administered in the 5th ward HOPE community as a followup to the initial survey from early 2022. This survey asks a variety of questions that try to capture a holistic picture of individuals and families' health physically as well as questions that capture the Center for Disease Control's protective factors to decrease violence.

In 2024, the survey had a 70% response rate that was supported by active canvassing efforts and a raffle for participants offering significant cash prizes. About half of respondents also completed the initial survey, so the 2024 results show cross-sectional (all-community) and longitudinal (within respondent) statistics.

The survey results generally show small improvements in residents experiencing utility shutoff, reports of safety, self-perception of physical health, mental health, and economic well being. For example, respondents reported less fear of physical harm, more access to medical care, fewer days of depression, more affordability of basic needs including food and heat, and more physical activity. There are also results that indicate families may be struggling more with housing security, usage of primary medical care and prescriptions, and risk factors such as tobacco use.

Overall, the health survey results suggest positive changes to quality of life for residents. The clearest gains are generally related to social outcomes, such as looking to neighbors for support, access to services, getting the help they need, feeling less lonely, and being more involved in the community. HOPE has created many more avenues for connection and involvement, as well as facilitated referrals to other agencies and systems that support physical, mental and economic health. The survey results suggest that along some of these avenues, health is readily improving.

****Note:** The results are based on a relatively small number of responses, from a specific area, that doesn't represent a random sample. Therefore, strong conclusions can not be made. Additionally, there is no way to directly causally link the health changes reported to specific HOPE initiatives. However, one of the largest changes in the neighborhood over the past two years has been the growing and interconnected HOPE initiatives, so any correlated improvements in outcomes are certainly indicative of HOPE's impact.

Opportunity



The HOPE community experienced and capitalized on many opportunities in 2024. One of the most far reaching projects undertaken so far, the Columbia Lot Project, kicked off in 2024. The vacant lot on Columbia Ave between Kearney and Lyons was purchased by Women's Services as a joint initiative with HOPE 5th Ward. Community members have formed a committee to guide and implement the aspects of usage and development that arose from community brainstorming. The most desired item for use of the space is a food forest/urban farm space where community members can grow their own food as well as harvest food for products to sell, such as jams and spices. Additionally, community members would like to see both passive and active recreation and gathering spaces as part of the development of the lot. It also emerged that the community thought that it was essential to include learning opportunities and sustainable energy as part of the project development. Finally, Women's Services and Common Roots are exploring the feasibility of incorporating an affordable housing development along Columbia Ave.

The development and usage of the Columbia Lot is going to happen in phases, and many different groups have been involved in the planning and design of the projects. This expansive project has created the opportunity for new and deeper collaborations between 5th ward residents and representatives from other organizations. Allegheny students from the FIJI Fraternity have been assisting with helping visualize the options for the space and will help plant trees in the coming months. Representatives from the Shade Tree Commission, Penn State Extension, and French Creek Valley Conservancy have also participated alongside community members in deciding priorities, finding funding opportunities, and offering expertise.

Phase One of the project includes the food forest and has been physically marked out on the lot, with the locations for fruit trees and garden rows noted in preparation of planting in early 2025. The opportunity for members of the community to become more self-sufficient and enhance their well-being is an incredible piece of this project, and all are excited about the plans and possibilities. A final opportunity presented by this project is the chance to name it! Community members have been suggesting names, but the decision has yet to be made, so you also have the opportunity to share your input with the HOPE team.

placemaking



Two fantastic placemaking initiatives have been major components of development in 5th ward in 2024, the Cussewago Square development and the Columbia Lot initiative. Rob Smith's development of the Cussewago Square project is a great example of strategic placemaking to redesign and renovate existing space for new energy and purpose. Although this is not a HOPE initiative, Rob has intentionally and integrally involved the HOPE 5th ward residents in the process in order to ensure that the project aligns with community goals. This is excellent placemaking because the design makes sure that the project presents an opportunity and expansion of community, not program counter to current identity or that presents a burden on previous infrastructure. The HOPE community is looking forward to continuing this partnership and to the continued development and opening of Cussewago Square.

The Columbia Lot project is the second major placemaking achievement of 2024. The project is an example of standard placemaking by reviving an existing community space, but is also one that builds empowerment of residents because they now have an ownership stake in the lot. The project has many components, but all of them seek to build community well being through improving health and happiness. The Columbia Lot project exemplifies the essential components and goals of placemaking through the plans for accessible and versatile recreation spaces, and the extensive food forest that is planned. The project embodies key placemaking elements of enhancing communal gathering spaces and reinforcing community identity. Although the project is still in the planning phase, regular meetings of the planning committee have been happening for the last half of 2024, and the process of planning has also exemplified placemaking through encouraging community interaction and focusing on community well-being. Aspects of the project are scheduled to begin installation in March 2025 and these components will enhance vitality and the sense of place and identity for HOPE 5th ward.



E^{ngagement}

The HOPE community has had many types of engagement in 2024. The HOPE health survey measured a self-described increase in community involvement by residents, and the results of that are evident in event attendance, resident empowerment, and increasing community awareness of the HOPE initiative.

Cussewago Square Advocacy

Rob Smith has been developing a formerly abandoned property into an experience destination for the entire region called Cussewago Square. The HOPE 5th ward community has been actively engaged in the project through input to and brainstorming with Mr. Smith. All involved would like the new development to feel like an enhancement to the community in and around 5th ward, not something separate. A key aspect of engagement for HOPE community members was a collective letter from leaders and resident council members in support of Rob Smith's application for a new liquor license to be used at Cussewago Square. This letter was well received by the Meadville City Council, where several HOPE residents also spoke in support. HOPE's support aided in the successful step of getting approval from city council, which was essential toward the state level application.

HOPE Residents Advocate for Sewer System Improvements

A second example of powerful engagement by HOPE residents in 2024 was another letter of support. The Meadville sewer systems would benefit from upgrades, and that is especially true in 5th ward, where ongoing issues have plagued residents for decades. Engagement by HOPE residents highlighting the importance of addressing sewer related issues in the neighborhood helped to convince the Meadville Area Sewer Authority (MASA) to apply for a grant to make some of those improvements. As part of the grant application process, HOPE residents penned a joint letter in support of the project. We are waiting to see if the grant will be approved. HOPE residents are now equipped for collective engagement in support of broader initiatives that will benefit the community.

New Community

Another aspect of engagement in 2024 was the beginning of a second HOPE community. The Spring-Wood neighborhood (Glenwood to Terrace to the north side of Spring to the west side of Baldwin) said Yes to becoming a HOPE community at the initial neighborhood town hall in December 2024. Canvassing and the Social Network Analysis survey began in the neighborhood in August and culminated in an important gathering at the town hall. Residents discussed how to improve the neighborhood and the importance of building social connections and being active for collective benefit. We all look forward to continued and growing engagement in HOPE Spring-wood moving forward.

Testimonials



Christopher R. Seeley - Crawford County Commissioner

“I had no idea how impactful this organization was until I attended my first meeting. Not only was I welcomed as a friend (even as I was a stranger to most in the room), I soon became aware of how deep the roots of this community run. I saw what a community can and should be. There was love, laughter, support, and recognition that the soul of a community is in how we treat one another. Every area of Crawford County can benefit from the model that HOPE offers!”

Maryann Menanno - Meadville City Manager

"The HOPE Initiative has been an invaluable force for positive change in Meadville, bringing together community partners to tackle some of our most pressing challenges, including housing insecurity, addiction recovery, and mental health services. Their commitment to fostering collaboration and providing direct support has strengthened the foundation of our community, offering hope and tangible solutions to those in need. In 2024, we have witnessed the incredible impact of their work—helping individuals find stable housing, supporting those on the path to recovery, and ensuring that vital resources are accessible to all. Their holistic approach to addressing social issues demonstrates the power of community-driven action and the difference that can be made when people come together with a shared purpose. As we reflect on this past year, we recognize the HOPE Initiative’s unwavering dedication and the countless lives they have touched. Their work is not only essential but transformative, creating a brighter future for Meadville. I look forward to seeing their continued success and the lasting change they will bring to our city in the years ahead."



TESTIMONIALS

Leah Parker - Crawford County Drug & Alcohol Executive Commission

“As a Prevention Specialist, I was approached about becoming a volunteer with HOPE Initiative's After School Program (ASP) and began helping in December of 2023. Over the course of the past year and some change, it has been a pleasure to assist in helping students from First District Elementary School grow into who they want to be; they have, in turn, also pushed me to learn and grow both personally and professionally. While it's not an easy task working with a range of students (students as young as second graders, and as old as sixth graders), it's nothing short of rewarding. I look forward to watching the program grow as kids come and go in the future!”



Alice Sjolander - Meadville Shade Tree Commission

I was first introduced to the HOPE Initiative of Crawford County Women's Services when Maria invited me to attend the first HOPE coffee hour. Frankly, I had no idea what to expect. I sat transfixed as the HOPE members shared stories of their triumphs and tribulations, met a new puppy and shared fellowship with the neighbors. What struck me the most was the fact that although these residents have little and have been through so much in their own lives were so willing to share what they had with their neighbors.

With the assistance of HOPE and Women's Services they are able to organize ways to assist their fellow residents with wellness checks, lawn cutting, snow removal, a community watch that keeps an eye on the ward and have established a beautiful community garden.

I have been a resident of the City of Meadville for over twenty years, and it wasn't until I attended that Coffee Hour at HOPE that I felt a strong sense of community.

The HOPE Initiative lives up to its name...proving hope for the future of our community.



TESTIMONIALS

COMMUNITY TWO

Stephanie Martin

“I am a resident of Spring-Wood and was approached by HOPE when the initial network canvassing of the neighborhood was starting to help. I am committed to civic and community engagement and have seen firsthand the magic that can happen when strong relationships are built between residents and neighbors, so I was eager to volunteer with HOPE. A few months later staffing changes at Women’s Services opened up a spot for an Assistant Organizer and I was able to join the HOPE team in that capacity. I have been so energized working with the residents and community partners who actively work to build projects and initiatives for the good of all. These residents come together across many differences in backgrounds and perspectives to implement projects for mutual aid and to improve collective resources and care for neighbors. I am so excited to see what develops with my neighbors in Spring-Wood as we get organized and connected to each other.”

Marlan Blair

“I grew up in a small town. One square mile and a total of 300 people. I actually delivered newspapers as a kid. I knew every family in town. We had a small convenience store in town where the old dudes would drink coffee and swap stories and gather the latest gossip about everyone in town. It felt important and homey to be part of that community. The area that we are referring to “spring-wood” is roughly that same size and with about as many residents. I think it is a good idea to put something forward that encourages people to, at the very least, acknowledge each other. I honestly don’t think that most people have any idea what it’s like to have neighbors that they know and care about. I said Yes to HOPE because it would be good to bring some of that back.”

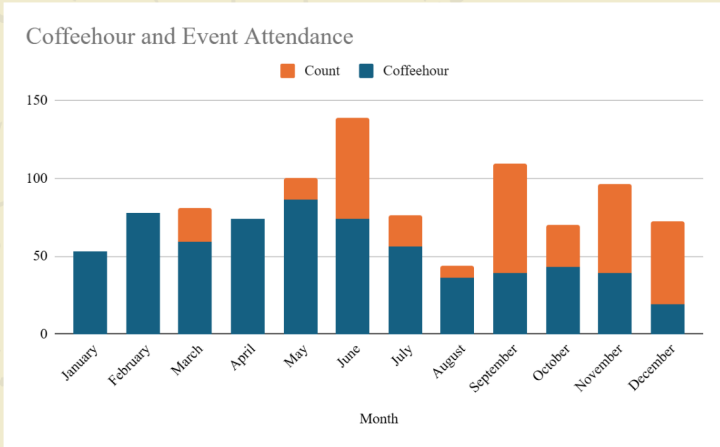


Spring Wood



Spring Wood

HOPE BY THE NUMBERS



: This chart captures the attendance at HOPE events by month throughout 2024. The attendance in blue is for weekly Coffeehours and in orange is the sum of attendance at other HOPE community events. This chart demonstrates significant engagement by HOPE community members, and Meadville residents. Total attendance at Coffee hours was over 650, and an additional 330 across HOPE events in 2024.

RESIDENT COUNCIL

Resident Council summarized their thoughts as follows:

The residents that make up the 5th ward Resident Council come to this work from different places and enjoy various aspects of the HOPE projects and initiatives. We appreciate that being a part of the council brings us together regularly to strengthen our connections and enjoy theme dinners. Being on the resident council gives some of us purpose and all of us a say in the initiatives that are being undertaken. We appreciate getting an overview of the HOPE projects and are excited to have a voice in the proactive prioritization of initiatives and activities.

We love that HOPE is open and welcoming to any who would like to join in and participate. We are proud to be a part of community initiatives that involve bringing residents together and participating in events that provide inclusive community and sustenance to our neighbors, like the harvest potluck and holiday event where Santa handed out gifts to all the children.

We are excited about the continuing initiatives that will enrich the community, like the garden expansion which should provide fresh food for all of us to enjoy. We look forward to continuing to participate, helping and interacting with residents in a variety of ways, and building our HOPE found family.

NOTE FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The HOPE Steering Committee, composed of representatives from Women’s Services, Inc. and a variety of community stakeholders, is tasked with guiding the HOPE initiative and helping the HOPE community organizers make the most effective impact.

Here is a statement from representative member Sarah Roncolato:

For the past three years it has been my privilege to be part of the HOPE (Health, Opportunity, Placemaking, Engagement) community development work in Fifth Ward. Although I am not a regular in weekly community programming, I’ve taken part in community picnics, holiday gatherings, coffee hours and monthly meetings of the steering committee. What inspires me most about HOPE is the commitment of Maria and the residents to the well-being of all residents, and the collaboration that has been nurtured in the broader community. I see, and feel, a deep commitment to a safe, supportive, beautiful community for all residents. This is demonstrated in conversations at the weekly coffee hours, through the leadership of the resident council, the shared work in the community garden, the effort put into the Greenscaping project, and the day-to-day neighbor to neighbor care. Beginning as a collaboration between Women’s Services, Inc. and Crawford County’s Peace4Crawford and Systems of Care, the HOPE initiative is now connected to and supported by a broad base of community partners from Allegheny College to Bayshore Homes. HOPE always has open arms, which has facilitated impressive growth in the Fifth Ward as well as an expansion into a new micro community this past year. We look forward to the expansion of HOPE into new neighborhoods, bringing new initiatives and growth, as well as the infusion of the Trauma Informed Community Development approach into wider community initiatives beyond Women’s Services and HOPE.

Maria Rosado-Husband



HOPE Staff

Stephanie Martin



Trauma Informed Community Development Organizer

It's year 5 and I'm just as excited and passionate about HOPE as I was in the very beginning. I can't wait to see what the future holds and what neighborhoods we will pop up into next. Our communities deserve to be valued, seen and heard and it all begins with a little HOPE.

Assistant Community Organizer

I volunteered with HOPE, then joined the team officially in the fall. I came to Meadville in 2005 and have always been passionate about community engagement. After leaving my teaching position, I have found a home with HOPE. I love meeting the residents and helping us all achieve great things from the ground up.

Collaborators



Penn State Extension



Active Aging Foundation



Crawford County Clean Slate



MLK Program



You Matter



CCDAEC



TLC Senior Solutions



City of Meadville



Associated Charities



Recovery Is NWPA



Bethany Church



Crawford County System Of Care



Not One More



Creating Landscapes



Allegheny College



The Home Depot



Meadville Medical Center



Peace 4 Crawford



FCCA



CHAPS



Pathstone



Meadville Public Library



Neighborhood Resilience Project



AmeriHealth



French Creek Valley Conservancy



CC Human Trafficking Task Force



Center For Family Service

Sponsors



Womans Services



Mary's U-Haul



PA Coalition Against
Domestic Violence



Mendal & Syla
Solomon Trust



Rotary Club of
Meadville



Bayshore Homes



Pennsylvania Coalition
To Advance Respect

Jean Martin - Bayshore Homes



“I first heard about the HOPE initiative from a good friend, Maria Rosado-Husband, whose excitement and passion for the program are contagious. I became an early supporter of HOPE because of its commitment to positively building neighborhood connections and communities of support. The changes that are made when residents come together in an accepting and supportive manner are incredible. HOPE directly helps residents with safe housing when neighbors assist each other with home improvements and with food security when neighbors start a community garden that’s produce is available to all. The important improvements that HOPE has made in 5th ward have even changed community culture to be more collaborative and made the entire community safer, demonstrated by decreased crime. I am excited about HOPE’s continuing efforts to take the HOPE initiative to other much needed neighborhoods. This project inspired me to get involved, by becoming a program sponsor, donor, and volunteer! I can’t wait to see HOPE’s vision become a growing reality in 2025 and years after.”