The second progress report from the Klee Foundation on its work with the Healthy Lifestyles Coalition.

Foreword: The Story So Far

When the Conrad and Virginia Klee Foundation helped to launch the Healthy Lifestyles Coalition (HLC), this was our first time taking on such a complex social issue. “We had some learning to do,” says Prakash Ramanathan, director of clinical operations and neuroscience services at United Health Services and vice chair of the Klee Foundation’s Board. “I don’t think any other foundation in the area has tackled a problem like this, in this way.”

Our original goal was to combat childhood obesity. But it soon grew clear that you can’t address children’s health without considering the health of whole families and the community. And you can’t address obesity without taking on a whole web of issues—access to healthy foods, nutritional literacy, cooking skills, opportunities for exercise, walkable streets and more.

“What seemed like a straightforward problem quickly became much more complicated,” says Patricia Ingraham, retired dean of the College of Community and Public Affairs at Binghamton University and our current Board chair.

Having identified the problem we wanted to address, the Klee Foundation released a request for proposals (RFP) to nonprofit agencies in the community. We sought a coalition of community partners to create a replicable model for improving the health of families, following parameters outlined in the RFP. In 2012, we awarded $300,000 to fund what would become the Healthy Lifestyles Coalition (HLC) and its pilot program, Eat Well. Play Hard. Binghamton! (EWPB).
From its headquarters in the Lee Barta Community Center (LBC) on Liberty Street, the HLC set out not just to improve access to healthy food and exercise, but to help community members take their health into their own hands. We hoped residents would learn to read nutrition labels, raise gardens and cook wholesome meals. We hoped adults and children would become more active—walking, biking, playing sports. And we hoped neighbors would soon lead the effort to improve well-being in the community.

The HLC’s initial vision was probably too ambitious, notes Amelia LoDolce, who managed the organization from its inception until 2016. “I’ve been waiting for the strawberries to grow because I really love strawberries. We planted romaine lettuce about three weeks ago, and we planted kale and beets at about the same time. The kale and beets look kind of the same, but also different. When you look at the beets, you can see that the stem is pink, the color of the original beets. The kale is just green. In Garden Club, I learned about how seeds really grow, and about all the good tastes. When I first came here last year and saw all the plants, I didn’t know what they were. But when I look at them and learn about them in Garden Club, I learn all the different tastes, and smells, and looks. It’s a good feeling, like breathing in fresh air, and the sun beating on you. It’s really nice.”

Samasia McBeemiles, age 9½,
Garden Club member, Roosevelt School
“We get FarmShare here, and they have cooking classes to show you how to cook the vegetables and combine them in your diet. That’s helped a lot. Then we started getting the CHOW truck, because Stacy and I pushed for vegetables. I’ve lost 82 pounds. We’ve got the fitness group going; I’m the leader of the walking group. And I’m working in the garden. I’ve been out there five days in a row, five hours at a time.”

Laura Race
North Side resident

to develop strong relationships with the dozens of agency partners we hoped to have, and then connecting well with a population of several thousand individuals, was particularly challenging.” But it’s good that the program set out to accomplish so much, she says. “You could see what would stick and learn from the process.”

As staff and partners have gained experience, they have kept learning and adjusting, adding and subtracting components and changing the way the pieces interconnect. This ongoing evolution has made the HLC a truly kaleidoscopic enterprise.

Farewell, But Not Goodbye
The Klee Foundation published a progress report on the HLC in 2014. We had planned to follow up with a final report. But the document you’re reading now is “final” only in the sense that we completed our funding at the end of 2016. The HLC is still very much a work in progress, now under the stewardship of United Way of Broome County. In addition, we expect that researchers at Binghamton University, who have been collecting data on EWPHB since the start, will publish an analysis later
in 2017. So our report is far from the last word on the HLC.

Nor is it a goodbye from Klee. Board members Linda Biemer, Prakash Ramanathan and our executive director, Judith Peckham, all serve on the HLC’s Advisory Board, where community partners share updates and ideas. “Klee’s Board is very eager to stay involved with something that’s been so close to us,” Peckham says.

Reporting the results of a program like this one is no simple matter. We went to the North Side hoping to gain enough experience and collect enough data to inform similar efforts in other locations. We want to say, “Here’s what we’ve seen. Here’s what seems to work.” But, of course, communities never stand still: children grow up, families move, businesses open and close, and government policies shift over time. The conclusions we draw today about best practices and priorities might not apply as neatly in a year or two.

Low income communities are particularly transient. How do you measure “before” and “after” in a neighborhood where people move in and out, responding to family issues, job opportunities, housing needs and a host of other reasons? We’re still wrestling with that question.

A Chance to Reflect

This report has two purposes. First we want to provide an update on the HLC and EWPHB since 2014. Second, we want to consider some essential questions about the program. What are its major successes so far? What remains to be achieved? How is the program developing? What lessons can we take away?

One fundamental lesson we have learned is that we need new tools to measure the success of a broad community effort such as the HLC. Hard data won’t give us all the answers we seek.

“The impacts are going to be very long term,” says Ingraham. “It’s not possible to look at the program right now and ask, ‘What difference did it make?’ Because while it has made some initial differences, I think its long term effects will be much more powerful.”
Like a kaleidoscope, the HLC looks different all the time. When we reported on the program in 2014, we highlighted numerous programs, each aiming in its own way to promote healthy living on the North Side. These included:

- FarmShare, a venture in community supported agriculture (CSA)
- Cooking and nutrition classes for adults
- Cooking Commandoes, which trained local residents to teach healthy cooking skills to their neighbors
- An afterschool soccer clinic
- Fresh Cycles, which teaches bicycle maintenance skills and lets youth earn their own bikes
- Safe Route to School and Complete Streets, two efforts to improve walkability in the neighborhood
- I Love My Block, a community beautification project

Some of those programs, such as FarmShare and Fresh Cycles, are still going strong. Some, such as the cooking classes for adults, have paused for an upgrade. A few, including the soccer clinic and the walkability initiatives, have run their course.

Today, North Side residents have more options, as well, for taking control of their well-being. Some of them have joined North Side Roots, a group for community advocacy that also runs a neighborhood watch. Some participate in a series of parent and community cafés run by the Broome County Promise Zone. At the Roosevelt School, there’s a gardening club and a cooking club for students. Each fall, the HLC sponsors a harvest dinner at the school, serving a meal that features produce grown by students in the school garden.

The HLC has launched the North Side Health Coaching Program, which includes group activities and one-on-one support. Fresh Cycles now takes young participants on cycling trips, while adults get moving with a walking club. The CHOW Mobile Food Market visits the North Side three times a week to sell fresh fruits and vegetables. And North Side residents have started coming together to celebrate at an annual block party, first held in 2016.

Also in 2016, LoDolce moved on from her position at the HLC to become executive director at a partner organization, VINES (Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments). The HLC hired Erin Monroe to fill the leadership position. She was soon joined by Tara Edmunds, family engagement and community outreach coordinator with the Broome
County Promise Zone, a position created as part of the Promise Zone’s new partnership with the HLC.

At the end of 2016, as the United Way took over as primary sponsor of the HLC, the coalition also started to revise its governance structure. The result was an Advisory Board of voting members who use an RFP process to solicit projects for HLC funding. The current board includes representatives from partner organizations, grantmaking organizations and others, from a wide variety of disciplines. “We were able to bring people to the table who have expertise in all the fields we need to make decisions and steer the project,” says Monroe.

Rosie Carter
honorary North Side resident

“I have moved out of the North Side, but I keep coming back because my friends are here. My children still enjoy the community center, and my son enjoys the bike program downstairs. Here at the Lee Barta Community Center we have the North Side Health Coaching program, which is really encouraging. Not only do we have a sisterhood with the speaker’s bureau, but we all stick together here: we help each other out. We’re a family. And the speaker’s bureau lets me know that I’m not alone. It has given me a voice. It lets me know that what I have to say is important: it does matter.”

Organizations represented on the HLC Advisory Board include:

- United Way of Broome County
- Conrad and Virginia Klee Foundation
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- VINES
- CHOW
- Binghamton University
- Broome County Promise Zone
- Binghamton Mayor’s Office
- Binghamton City Council
- Broome County Health Department
- Binghamton City School District
Having made a new round of funding decisions, the Advisory Board is now reviewing the HLCs’ goals to see how well they fit the community’s changing dynamics. Among other things, the Board plans to convene several focus groups to get input from local residents.

Throughout the evolution of the HLC, one thing has stayed constant: the program offers nearly endless occasions for discovery and growth. All stakeholders—North Side residents, staff, community partners and funders—are bound to find more such opportunities in the years to come.

“This is my first year in Fresh Cycles. I’ve earned a Mongoose bike, and I’ve learned to do wheelies at the bike park. I help people fix their tires, and I help Shams take bikes apart so they can use the parts for other bikes in case they need them. I’ve gone on rides to Rec Park and South Side Park. Last Saturday we went to South Mountain. It was hard, but it was really cool. We saw a snake up there, and some deer, and a woodchuck. Bike trips are fun. You get out of the house, get some air and discover new places.”

Tarron Stewart, age 12
Fresh Cycles member
The Role of Residents

From the start, a major goal of the HLC has been for North Side residents to feel that they own this program. We want them not only to join in activities, but to help plan and run them.

That effort has seen some success. For instance, residents took part in the job interviews that led to hiring Monroe and Edmunds. They later helped to interview candidates for several other positions.

“Residents often pick up on things that we don’t. They’re really good at reading people,” says Monroe. “I think they feel more ownership, and feel better connected to the people who come in, when they’ve had a part in deciding who gets hired.”

Residents sometimes suggest ideas for HLC programs and, thanks to their inside knowledge of the neighborhood, offer valuable feedback on ideas from the staff. Take the time, early in her tenure, when Monroe suggested putting up basketball hoops on an empty lot on Liberty Street. “They said, ‘No way!’” she recalls. “‘It’s not going to be kids hanging out; it will be all the older guys in the neighborhood, whom you don’t necessarily want there.’”

Community members volunteered at the HLC’s neighborhood block party in 2016. “We helped set it up, we helped take it down—the whole nine yards,” says North Side resident Wanda Rivera. In 2017, residents joined the committee that planned the second annual party.

Also, members of North Side Roots helped the HLC shift into temporary quarters in the Binghamton Plaza while the City of Binghamton enlarged the LBC’s building. “We all volunteered time to pack and move the Center,” Rivera says.

Some people who live near the LBC have taken it upon themselves to keep the neighborhood looking good, says Conrad Taylor, a member of the Binghamton City Council, whose district includes the North Side. “We have community leaders emerging in this area and physically cleaning up the street. It might be an organized cleanup, where people go around together, or just someone picking up trash in the afternoon because they want to have an investment in their neighborhood.”

Increasing Trust

While some residents have emerged as leaders, there’s still a lot more opportunity for empowerment in the neighborhood. The core group of active community members is small. Most of them live close to the LBC and participate in many of the HLC’s programs.

Along with HLC staff and partners, those residents are trying to extend the program’s reach into other corners of the North Side. “A lot of our new participants tend to come in through word of mouth,” Edmunds says. “We do outreach, but there’s usually more investment if they come with a friend or family member.”

Still, some people in the neighborhood won’t participate in HLC activities at all. “Over the years, they have seen a lot of programs come and go pretty quickly,” says Monroe. They don’t trust that the HLC will stick with the community for the long haul.

One key to building trust is to arrive with the right attitude, says Shams Harper, a volunteer instructor who leads the Fresh Cycles program. “Am I here to ‘save’ this neighborhood, or am I here to do things that we both enjoy, that make our lives better for our own reasons?” he asks. It’s also important to remember that HLC staff and volunteers who don’t live on the North Side are guests there, he adds. They need to serve the neighborhood’s needs, not push an agenda. “We are successful to the extent that the Lee Barta Community Center’s neighbors talk about us and are willing to say they stand behind this project.”
bring fruits and vegetables: some are even donated for free, for people who don’t always have money,” Carter says. “We’re making progress.”

Greater Engagement

The Harvest Dinner at the Roosevelt School encourages engagement by forging a connection between residents and the school. “People are always impressed and appreciative not only of the food they’re eating, but of the fact that it’s coming from right outside the back door,” says Cathy Frankenbach, a fifth grade teacher at Roosevelt who serves on the HLC Advisory Board. The dinner also gives parents an extra occasion to talk with teachers and school administrators, and with one another, she says.

Let People Find Their Voice

Several initiatives under the HLC umbrella are specifically designed to foster community spirit and leadership. Along with North Side Roots and the community and parent cafés, those efforts have included a Speakers’ Bureau, run by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier at the LBC in the spring of 2017.

The Food Bank started the Speakers’ Bureau to make sure that when people talk about how to combat food insecurity, the discussion includes individuals who actually struggle with that problem. “The goal is to switch the narrative on who is an expert, to let people find their voice and speak for themselves,” says Randi Quackenbush, the organization’s advocacy and education manager.

In ten three-hour sessions, the Bureau’s eight participants took training in skills such as public speaking, storytelling, talking with the media and advocacy. “They feel like they are finding their voice, that they are more connected,” Quackenbush says. “They understand that they are leaders in the community and that they do have expertise.”

Participants have talked with leaders of various community organizations, such as Catholic Charities, the Family Enrichment Network and the Salvation Army, as well as with local politicians, says Rosie Carter, a graduate of the speaker’s bureau. “They come in and listen to what we have to say about things that affect us daily, that may not affect them.”

Members scored a big success after telling visitors how harmful it was that no stores on the North Side sold fresh produce. “We got the mobile van to
As a coalition, the HLC relies on a broad spectrum of community organizations that contribute programming, funding, insights and ideas. This collaborative structure has let the HLC build on the great work that other groups were doing before our initiative took shape. "Cornell Cooperative Extension is already expert in nutrition education, so we partner with them to provide that programming here on the North Side," says Monroe, by way of example. "VINES knows how to strengthen food systems and help people get better access to food."

“Rachel came from Cooperative Extension to do nutrition. I learned so much from her, it was unbelievable! She used Crisco to show us how much fat is in different foods. She gave us a bun, and then we each picked a card that showed a different kind of food. We had to scoop out the number of scoops of fat it contained. I did Kentucky Fried Chicken. There was about that much fat, and the bun.

I have not gone to Kentucky Fried Chicken since then! I’m really paying more attention to labels and what’s in food. And I try to keep busy—not sit around.”

Laurie Perry
North Side resident
Another example of this collaboration is the partnership between the HLC and the Broome County Promise Zone. The Promise Zone is itself a collaboration, among Binghamton University, Broome-Tioga BOCES, the Broome County Department of Mental Health, two BOCES sites and six school districts. The program gives low-income families extra support to help their children succeed in school, and its track record in community engagement is superb.

The HLC had been operating for about two years when Ingraham pointed out that our program and the Promise Zone were addressing many of the same issues. So Peckham and LoDolce reached out to Laura Bronstein, dean of BU’s College of Community and Public Affairs and a major player in the Broome County Promise Zone, and to Luann Kida, the Promise Zone’s community schools director. After several meetings and a presentation to the Board, the Klee Foundation decided to fund a position within the Broome County Promise Zone to manage that organization’s work at the Roosevelt School. The same person would also coordinate outreach on the North Side, working from the LBC. That’s the position Edmunds fills, working closely with Monroe.

One of Edmunds’ jobs is to run the cafés at the LBC and the Roosevelt School. The weekly sessions at the Center create a sense of community. “People who come are able to bounce ideas off one another and develop new

“I like Garden Club because of all the plants. I love chives and strawberries, and I like to garden. I help my grandmother with her plants at home. We’re all plant people in my family. I also like to cook. I fry a lot of things—chicken, okra, onions, broccoli. My mom loves seafood, so we do a lot of cooking. In the school garden, we’ve eaten parsnips, Swiss chard, carrots, broccoli and lots of other vegetables. Garden Club is awesome. I give it a five star rating—for the food, too!”

Marcel Collins, age 11, Garden Club member, Roosevelt School
This expansion is critical, says Taylor. The original LBC encompasses just 1,200 square feet. “There’s not a lot of space to expand.” The more room the Center has for programs, the more residents the HLC will be able to draw in, he says.

Local officials, including Taylor, Akshar, State Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Binghamton Mayor Richard David and some of his staff, have attended HLC events and shown a real interest in the neighborhood.

**Government Support**

Along with numerous community agencies, some state and local government leaders have become important partners in the HLC’s initiatives. One turning point in that relationship came in November 2016, when the City of Binghamton’s decided to demolish a vacant property next door to the Lee Barta Community Center and use that space to triple the size of the community building. The city is building the addition with $100,000 of its own money, $300,000 in state grants procured by State Senator Fred Akshar and $50,000 from Visions Federal Credit Union. North Side residents will be involved in determining uses for the new building.

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“The Lee Barta Community Center is like a neutral zone. If you have a problem with a neighbor, everybody’s here, and we discuss it, instead of it being just a problem ‘out there.’ We’ve also started a bartering system in the neighborhood. For example, Stacy is very active in VINES. If she needs help weeding or watering or planting, she’ll let me know. I put in the help, and then when she has tomatoes, she’ll give me tomatoes. Or Rosie will take me grocery shopping. I give her money for gas, and I get all my groceries for the month. Because we’re all here, and we talk about our problems, especially at Roots and Promise Zone, it’s given us the ability to come up with this barter system to cover the holes and needs we all have.”

Wanda Rivera
North Side resident
Evidence-based” is the gold standard for social and health care interventions. Define a problem, measure the baseline, apply a corrective, and measure the “after” state. If the data points to improvement, you’ve found an effective solution.

If only life were that straightforward.

As we have already noted, helping a community chart a path toward its own healthy future is no simple matter. Health is a multifaceted issue, and the community itself keeps changing.

Since the start of the HLC, a research team at Binghamton University’s Decker School of Nursing has been collecting data to evaluate the success of Eat Well. Play Hard. Binghamton! Periodically, researchers have surveyed children in grades 3-5, their parents or guardians and a random sampling of people in the Roosevelt School district. For comparison, they have also surveyed corresponding groups in the district of the Benjamin Franklin School, on Binghamton’s South Side, where the HLC isn’t active.

Data collected in these surveys points to some success. “There were significant improvements among the children in the intervention group that were not evident in the comparison group,” says Yvonne Johnston, research associate professor at the Decker School. For example, over time, more children from the Roosevelt School district reported playing outdoors more than 30 minutes a day and doing activities with one or both parents. “We saw improvement in eating vegetables and reduction in sodas and soft drinks,” she says. Children seemed to know how many servings of fruit and vegetables one should eat each day, and understand the connections between diet and certain diseases.

The surveys also point to some persistent problems. For example, many children don’t get enough sleep, which is important to healthy development.

Despite some encouraging results, surveys can’t fully measure the effect of a complex effort such as HLC on community health. It’s kind of like evaluating a class one has taught, Johnston says. “You can measure grades. You can give standardized tests. But to measure the impact that you might have on a person’s life is a real challenge. Some of those things are better assessed through focus groups and getting a chance to talk to people.”

As the HLC continues its work, it will take a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, pursued over quite a few years, to reveal the real impact of Eat Well. Play Hard. Binghamton! and extract its most valuable lessons.
Key Lessons Learned

As we noted earlier, participants in the HLC quickly found that it’s impossible to address the health and eating habits of children without including the whole family and the community. That’s just one of many lessons the HLC has learned through experience, working day by day with North Side residents and community partners, observing what worked and what didn’t, and making many changes along the way.

Here are some other important lessons we learned, from initiatives that turned out well and some that need further thought.

Life is Complicated
“You can’t change somebody’s lifestyle by telling them to change their lifestyle,” says Monroe. Many North Side residents face a tangle of challenges that get in the way of healthy eating and exercise—financial issues, housing issues, relationship issues, lack of transportation, and past and present trauma, to name just a few. “If you’re struggling with food or housing insecurity, you’re not necessarily going to be thinking about making healthier food choices.”

“Our decisions about what we eat are based not just on what is healthy for us, but on what is comforting, what is our culture, and other factors,” says LoDolce. Not everyone involved in the HLC understood that challenge at the start, although agency partners who already worked in this field certainly did, she says. “This was an opportunity to educate folks about the reality of what influences our health, and how hard it is to effect change in eating and physical activity.”

“I’ve taken nutrition, I’m in Kim’s fitness group and I take Kristen’s cooking class. I’m a founding member of Roots, which is a neighborhood watch. I volunteer with Fresh Cycles, and I’m an all-around volunteer. The Healthy Lifestyles Coalition has been life-changing. I’ve dropped 46 pounds. You get access to the vegetables, and then you take a nutrition class. You take a cooking class that teaches you different ways to prepare those fruits and vegetables. And then you take a fitness class. I downloaded a pedometer app onto my phone, so now I can be aware of how many steps I take throughout the day and how many calories I’m burning. I’m walking more. And because I’ve started dropping weight, and with that comes feeling better physically, I’m now riding a bike again.”

Stacy Richards
North Side resident
You Can’t Hurry Trust
When HLC’s leadership decided to include North Side residents in hiring decisions, that helped get more residents to engage with the program. “Having them involved in who we bring in allows them to bring their wall down a little,” says Edmunds. But we’ve learned that it takes time to earn trust, and there’s still more work to do. That includes stronger outreach to residents who live more than a couple of blocks from the LBC.

School-Community Connections Count
We learned this through the HLC’s partnership with the Broome County Promise Zone, which hired Edmunds to work both within the Roosevelt School and at the LBC. With one person to serve as a liaison, we developed better communications between the two realms.

Flexibility Breeds Success
Cooking is Fun, a six-week class for kids conducted at the Roosevelt School by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), is a hit with the kids who take it. Always full to capacity, the class teaches healthy eating basics, such as how to avoid excess fats and sugars and how to read nutrition labels. Kids also learn to make recipes. “They are developing skills that they can carry into their homes,” says Ann Supa, nutrition educator at CCE, who runs the program.

Part of the program’s success comes from Supa’s ability to switch things around as needed. For example, she no longer teaches the kids to make smoothies. “Ninety percent of them don’t have a blender in their home. So I changed,” Supa says.

Some students who come to the class have already seen the harsh side of life. They don’t care about being healthy, because they don’t expect to live long, Supa says. The cooking class helps them understand that taking care of themselves can lead to better prospects. “They realize, ‘I need to start eating healthier so I can do well in school. Then maybe I can go to college, or go into the armed forces, or get a job’.”

A big key to the success of the class, Supa says, is accepting each student at whatever point he or she has reached in life. “They’re all kids. They all want to learn. We just have to give them the tools, and then they grow.”

Meeting people where they are has also improved the HLC’s exercise initiatives for adults. At the outset, despite the best intentions, residents found it hard to stick with programs such as the HLC’s running club. Some lacked time. Many needed, literally, to walk before they could run.

In 2017, with support from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, physical activity specialist Kim Schwartz launched the North Side Health Coaching Program at the Lee Barta Community Center. Following a model developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the program promotes overall health. “I’m not trying to get people to do jumping jacks or Pilates,” Schwartz says. “It’s more about being fit for life.”

The program includes classroom sessions on topics such as physical activity, nutrition and disease prevention. Schwartz offers one-on-one coaching and also leads group activities. “We do yoga biweekly. We’ve had Zumba instructors come in. We do community walk and talk.”

Schwartz started the program with a goal of graduating 20 participants. Because not all students can attend all sessions, she learned she needs to be flexible about graduation criteria. But she has seen some striking successes. “I’ve had people who barely have shoes going home and making healthy meals for their families, and walking in the community, and losing 20 pounds,” she says. “I think we’re doing great things. Maybe it’s not to the scale we could be doing, but I think that comes with the territory.”
With the United Way now funding the HLC, the program continues to build on its successes and on lessons learned. Among other goals, partners and staff look forward to engaging with more North Side residents, further expanding access to healthy food, helping to raise nutritional IQs even higher and adding more programs focused on physical activity. Perhaps most of all, we want to encourage more North Side residents to emerge as leaders in the cause of good health. If residents can advocate for themselves, the North Side will continue the HLC’s good work, whether or not the organization stays on in its current form.

The enlarged LBC will help keep the momentum going. So will the $5.6 million facility the Salvation Army is building on State Street, which will include a gym, meeting rooms, two commercial-sized kitchens and a community garden.

No One Can Go it Alone
“If there’s going to be a community project, it has to focus on a partnership that includes government, the business community and the nonprofit community,” says Peckham. The HLC illustrates how important it is, when tackling a large issue, to combine the strengths of many stakeholders.

Reality Checks are Important
“You can’t start anything without bringing it to community members,” says Edmunds. “You have to be open to their feedback, the pros and cons.”

Stay Flexible
Even programs that work terrifically at the start may eventually lose steam. One example is the HLC’s original series of cooking classes for adults. While those succeeded for several years, over time, class members stopped trying to cook and started letting staff do most of the work.

“People need to be pushed a little outside their comfort zone, if you want them to do something awesome,” says Monroe. In the next incarnation of the cooking class, staff will show members how to measure and prep meal ingredients to take away and cook at home. This story illustrates how crucial it is to stay open to new ideas. If Plan A doesn’t work, move on to Plan B or C.

Not All Success Lies in the Data
“This kind of work is messy, in that there’s so much going on at one time,” says Monroe. “The results aren’t always tangible, and that can be frustrating. But we see that we’re definitely heading in the right direction.” Little by little, more residents are participating in programs and buying into the principles of the HLC. Also, residents report improvements in their own health, both physical and mental, Edmunds says. “They’re in a better head space, or they’re not seeing their therapist as often.”

Looking Ahead
With our role on the Advisory Board, the Klee Foundation will continue to work with the HLC. At the same time, our Board is discussing how to direct resources toward other large community issues and create the best possible impact.

When the Klee Board first discussed tackling childhood obesity, members were skeptical, says Ramanathan. “There was some general apprehension about whether we had the expertise to take this on.” That feeling appears to have changed, he says. Based on its experience with the HLC, Board members seem more confident in their ability to work on major community challenges.

The Klee Foundation will continue to consider how to use its resources to support broad, complex initiatives and improve the community, says Peckham. “It’s mostly about leveraging things with money,” she observes. “But it’s also about building new alliances and partnerships. I think this is a turning point for the Klee Foundation’s Board.”

“I joined Garden Club because I like to plant things, and I like fruits and vegetables. My mom comes with me to work in the garden, but she’s not here today. I liked growing the peppers, beets, the corn that I just did, the squash, peas and beans. It’s fun to dig holes, put the seeds in and get my hands in the dirt. Next year I want to join Cooking Club so I can learn to cook those things we’ve been growing. I just asked Ms. Christine why cucumbers have bumps on the outside. She doesn’t know the answer, so she’s going to Google it.”

Cara-Jane Webster, age 9½, Garden Club member, Roosevelt School
“The people at the Lee Barta Community Center are beyond great to me, all of them help me in so many ways. It’s hard to explain, but trust and believe they will help you in any situation. So let your pride up and ask if you need help. Trust me, they will. Thanks to all of them, my family!”

Terrance Patterson
North Side resident

On the cover: Cara-Jane Webster, member of the Garden Club at Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School, plants corn with Ann Supa, nutrition educator from Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Klee Foundation Focus Statement

The Conrad and Virginia Klee Foundation is committed to promoting, nurturing and educating a healthy, economically viable community. Accordingly, we will give priority to grant proposals seeking funding to support sustainable programs that can demonstrate how they can help to achieve that goal and that can demonstrate how they meet a documented community need.

Elements of this goal may include, but not be limited to:

- Educating and promoting healthy lifestyles
- Encouraging organizations to collaborate
- Ensuring that all people in Broome County – from recent high school grads to older adults – have access to higher education
- Strengthening the rich arts opportunities of the area

For more about the Conrad and Virginia Klee Foundation, go to our website www.kleefoundation.org or contact us at 607-722-2266 or Email: KleeFoundation@stny.rr.com.