



Sessions & Speakers

Wade Norwood, Keynote Speaker

Wade Norwood, a Rochester, NY native, has held leadership positions in his community for over 3 decades. Working at the intersection of health, local government, education and community planning, Norwood exemplifies the multi-sector approach in building healthy and resilient communities.

In his current role as Common Ground Health's Chief Strategy Officer, Norwood provides strategic direction on integrating the agency's clinical, public health, and prevention programs. He oversees the agency's programming and processes in addition to building critical partnerships with other regional organizations. He also supports the agency's on-going community and consumer engagement coalitions. Furthermore, he serves as an at-large member of New York State's Board of Regents, which presides over the nation's most comprehensive and unified educational system.

Norwood also spent 16 years on Rochester City Council and was the chair of the Committee on Housing and Community Development. During his tenure, he crafted the legislative guide for the City's long-range 2010 strategic plan and supervised City Council's review of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code. Norwood was also instrumental in the creation of the nationally recognized "Neighbors Building Neighborhoods" planning process.

Strategic Communication and Advocacy

Creating community change requires strategic communication and advocacy. This interactive workshop will guide you through the steps of identifying the audiences you need to reach in order to meet your desired outcomes. Learn how to create communication and advocacy strategies to shape the policies, systems and environments that will improve the health of the entire community.

Speaker: Sherée Thaxton Vodicka

Sherée Thaxton Vodicka is the Executive Director of the NC Alliance of YMCAs, a statewide coalition comprised of all 26 YMCA Associations in North Carolina. In this role, Vodicka manages the strategic direction, communication and advocacy work of the state's Alliance in support of the Y's mission and cause. Prior to her work with the NC Alliance of YMCAs, Vodicka served as the Director of Advocates for Health in Action, a Wake County-based healthy weight collaborative. Prior to that, Vodicka served eight years managing integrated marketing communications for the N.C. Division of Public Health's Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch around healthy eating, physical activity and healthy weight for all North Carolinians. Vodicka received a Bachelor of Science degree in dietetics with honors from the University of Kentucky, and a Master of Arts degree in mass communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she was a Park Fellow. She is a Registered and Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist, and holds a Nonprofit Management Certificate from Duke University. She is a member of the NC Professional Lobbyist Association, and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She lives in Raleigh with her husband, Doug.

Building Leadership and Capacity on a Local Level

Speakers in this session will lead you through how local organizations and initiatives are building leaders and capacity at a personal level, in organizations, and throughout the community. You will explore the link between leadership, capacity building and sustainability through the lens of local projects.

Speakers: Jennifer Gregory and Joshua Hearne

Jennifer is Executive Director of Middle Border Forward (MBF), a nonprofit community development organization serving Danville, VA; Pittsylvania County, VA; and Caswell County, NC. She is a North Carolina native and graduate of Regent University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English/Speech & Communications. Prior to joining MBF, Jennifer spent eight years serving low-income families and advocating for economic equity in rural North Carolina with Franklin-Vance-Warren Opportunity, a nonprofit Community Action Agency. She is an alum of the Rural Economic Development Institute (REDI), the NC Nonprofit Leadership Academy, Leadership North Carolina and Leadership Southside. Jennifer's passions include social justice, traveling, football, and Star Wars.

Joshua is a founding member of, and a leader with, Grace and Main Fellowship, an intentional, Christian community in Danville, Virginia. He's also the Executive Director of Third Chance Ministries, a ministry of Grace and Main dedicated to grassroots community development and leadership development. Joshua is a graduate of Georgetown College and Duke University, as well as a current doctoral student in community development at Mercer University where he's engaged in research about alternative models of affordable housing in rural and resource-poor contexts. Joshua is a husband, a father, a native son of central Appalachia, and an irrational fan of Kentucky basketball.

Plenary Speed Sessions

Leadership and Capacity Building: Lamond Daniels, Aetna Foundation - Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge

Active Living: Emily Ragsdale, Danville Parks and Recreation - Complete Streets

Healthy Eating: Kirsten Halverson, YAEP Program Manager - Youth Agriculture Entrepreneurship Program

Access to Healthcare: Martina Tatum, Community Health Worker & Lori Neal, Client - Community Health Worker Initiative

Healthy Spaces: Amanda Oakes, Danville Pittsylvania Community Services - THRIVE! Challenge

Sustaining Your Work

Coalitions can be the cornerstones for creating successful change within a community. They can represent an array of local interests and bring together organizations and individuals to build a power base that works to influence policy, systems, environments, and social changes of mutual concern. Join this session to consider the variety of ways to sustain and strengthen efforts, such as leveraging resources, developing leadership, and honing skills to improve environments in the region.

Speaker: Tim Schwantes

As a Project Officer for Active Living By Design, Tim Schwantes works on regional and national initiatives that support community collaboratives and partnerships to improve public health through changes in local policies, procedures, and the built environment. Tim provides technical assistance, facilitation and collaboration support, and monitoring efforts for partnerships, decision makers, and grassroots leaders across the country. In all of his endeavors, Tim strives to work with others to advance health equity, create and deepen authentic engagement, build and connect capacities, and show up with a spirit of curiosity and adventure. He has worked with state-level partners to incorporate health into bicycle and pedestrian plans and managed and supported community health assessment efforts in Alamance and Wake Counties, NC. Tim earned master's degrees in social work and public health, as well as a B.A. in public policy with a specialization in health policy, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. An avid runner, Tim has competed in many marathons and triathlons, including the Boston Marathon and an Ironman.

Community Engagement and Health Equity

Fostering equity and inclusion through constant and consistent community engagement is a critical step in community improvement initiatives. However, it is often overlooked. Join this session to learn how the Food Access and Equity Task Force of Richmond, is ensuring its work is infused with authentic community engagement through the development of and partnership with the resident-led Richmond Food Justice Alliance.

Speakers: Elizabeth Theriault and Omari Al-Qadaffi

Elizabeth Theriault is a Chronic Disease Prevention Supervisor at Richmond City Health District, providing strategy and leadership to improve resident's health outcomes by developing programs, policies and environmental strategies to prevent chronic diseases. Elizabeth moved to Richmond from Vermont where she became passionate about food systems and food insecurity as program director for a non-profit in sustainable agriculture and food systems. Elizabeth has over 15 years' experience working in the social sector in the United States and abroad. Her work has focused on public health education, nutrition and food systems. Elizabeth has designed and implemented health education and prevention curriculums to be implemented in communities in New Zealand, England, Boston and Vermont. Elizabeth also has extensive experience providing technical assistance to community groups and developing community based participatory assessments and research projects. Elizabeth earned her Bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in sociology and women's studies and a Master's in Public Health and Social Work from Boston University.

Community organizer and activist, Omari Al-Qadaffi is driven by his belief that the exclusion of communities from public and private resources in specific geographies is the cause of generational poverty, food deserts, and nearly all socioeconomic disparities. Leveraging previous careers in software engineering and sales, Omari is skilled in identifying and organizing resources to solve complex problems as well as communicate those concerns and solutions to diverse groups. He is the founder of the advocacy group, "Leaders of the New South - Community Council", which led a successful campaign to retain bus coverage to low-income minority neighborhoods resulting in modification of the Richmond Transit Network Plan. Omari is a Richmond native and father of 2 and is recognized as a Richmond Public Schools Outstanding Parent of the Year. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from Virginia Commonwealth University.