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## A Purdue Community Partner: The Hartford Hub of Lower Lincoln

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# COMMUNITY PARTNER SNAPSHOTS

Community partner snapshots describe the mission and vision of a community partner and highlight engagement opportunities for Purdue students with the organization and/or the clients.

## A Purdue Community Partner: The Hartford Hub of Lower Lincoln

Mark D'Aloia (*Nuclear Engineering*) and Nick Young (*Pharmaceutical Sciences*)

### Student Author Bio Sketches

**Mark D'Aloia** has spent quite a bit of time at the Hartford Hub during his years at Purdue. After joining the Ware Research Group in his freshman year, he spent the summer of 2017 working at the Hub, and has volunteered there on and off for the rest of his semesters. He graduated in May 2020 with a bachelor of science in Nuclear Engineering.

**Nick Young** has volunteered at the Hartford Hub as a student in Dr. Ware's 2018 fall HONR 299 Well-Being course and as a member of the Ware Research Group for the 2019 spring semester. He graduated from Purdue University in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in Pharmaceutical Science and is currently pursuing his MD at IU School of Medicine's West Lafayette campus.

### Introduction

For many Purdue students, the Greater Lafayette area can seem like just a backdrop for their college experience. Students can come and go without feeling like a part of the surrounding community or engaging with their resident neighbors, especially those across the bridge in Lafayette. The Lincoln Neighborhood's

Hartford Hub provides an existing and underutilized framework to develop such relationships between Lafayette residents and Purdue students. Little more than a mile from Purdue's campus, the Lincoln Neighborhood runs from Union Street to Greenbush Street and from 14th Street to the Wabash River. Lincoln consists mostly of low-cost rental properties and many residents earn lower incomes. Community members have complained of drug use, violence, and poor upkeep of properties while Lincoln struggles with a high resident turnover. The western part of the neighborhood, bordering the Wabash, is known as Lower Lincoln. Lower Lincoln is a mostly rental property area with high resident turnover that is served by the Hartford Hub community center. The Hartford Hub, known simply as "the Hub" to regulars, is a multipurpose space run by the Faith Community Development Corporation (FCDC). It offers programs serving Lincoln residents of all ages, helping them to engage with their community and improve their quality of life.

While the Hartford Hub offers an excellent way for students to volunteer and engage with their community, it is not yet well known among students as a volunteering opportunity. Dr. Jason Ware, clinical assistant professor for the Purdue Honors College, has introduced a growing number of students to the Hartford Hub through his HONR 29900: Urban Youth Advocacy and HONR 39900: Well-Being courses as well as his own research group. These provide excellent ways for students to volunteer while gaining research experience, though students and organizations interested in working with the

Hub are encouraged to reach out directly as well. The variety of programs offered at the Hub allow students with a wide range of interests to get involved. Overall, the Hartford Hub provides a valuable relationship-building resource, not only to build relationships between Lincoln residents, but between members of the Lincoln and Purdue communities as well.

### Community Partner Description

The Hartford Hub (Figure 1) is a part of the Faith Community Development Corporation (FCDC), a ministry of Faith Church focused on improving the Lafayette community through community organization and affordable housing. To determine what residents felt was needed, the FCDC conducted research in the Lincoln neighborhood. The result was the creation of the Hartford Hub, led by Faith pastor Joey Wright, with the mission “to seek and glorify God by providing a safe space for Lincoln residents to build relationships and enrich lives.” The Hub serves as a third space, apart from home or work, for residents to relax and build community. It

offers residents a 3,166-square-foot community space equipped with an outdoor park, basketball court, office space, large community room, and two meeting rooms. Operations are now led by Lincoln resident and Faith Bible Seminary student Greg Palys, who coordinates the Hub’s many community building events. Most of the time, the Hub is full of children. The children come on their own every day, excited to see their friends and the staff. Most children stay at the Hub for daily homework time, a time to gather inside and work on homework or other educational activities with the help of community volunteers, often Purdue students. Neighborhood children can also participate in First Lego League, a program at the Hub that uses Lego Mindstorm robots to provide early exposure to STEM-related projects. Before the Hub closes, many children help with daily chores and cleaning.

While the Hub is most frequently occupied by the neighborhood’s children, there are events for older residents, too. A monthly bingo night offers older residents the chance to win prizes and socialize with their neighbors.



Figure 1. The outside of the Hartford Hub.

Each month, the Hub houses the Lincoln Neighborhood Association meeting, where residents of the Lincoln neighborhood can come and converse about the status of the community. These meetings have been used to provide residents an opportunity to speak with city government representatives, plan events like neighborhood cleanup, or discuss concerns shared by neighbors. Outcomes of the meetings include traffic, sidewalk, and lighting studies that have resulted in new curbs and lighting fixture repairs in the neighborhood. Meetings also serve as a time to plan various block parties that the Hub has sponsored to give residents the chance to socialize and celebrate in one collective space. In the fall, the Hub hosts a Halloween party with a safety-conscious “Trunk or Treating” theme and pumpkin carving (Figure 2). With the high turnover in the Lincoln area, fun events allow residents to get to know each other better and improve their community well-being. Lincoln Neighborhood residents have been very positive about the Hub, appreciating the help with after-school childcare and the good role models that Joey, Greg, and the rest of the staff provide for the children.

### Opportunities for Students

The easiest way for Purdue students to become familiar with the Lincoln Neighborhood and its residents is to help with homework time, a program open to children from preschool to high school every weekday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Children typically outnumber volunteers, so there is a high demand for homework time volunteers to provide assistance and help keep children focused. Volunteers are also welcome to participate in playtime before or after homework time as the Hub remains open until 8:30. Any community members can volunteer at homework time, but Purdue students especially can be highly effective volunteers. Young adults can serve as relatable role models and provide guidance to children who may not interact with college students very often.

It is easy to start volunteering at homework time, but regularity is very important. All relationships take time to build and new volunteers may have a more difficult time connecting with children in their first visits. Once relationships are developed, the children look forward



**Figure 2.** A pumpkin carving contest at one of the Hartford Hub’s Halloween parties.

to seeing the volunteers each week and will be disappointed when volunteers miss weeks. Getting to know the children and developing relationships with them is incredibly rewarding. Volunteering at the Hub is a great opportunity for any Purdue student who wants to give back to the Lafayette community and unwind by spending just a couple hours each week coloring, reading, playing basketball, tag, video games, and just spending time with a large group of energetic children. Volunteering at homework time also provides an opportunity for students studying education, social work, or health professions to practice their skills working with kids by motivating them to focus on schoolwork. Purdue students with a STEM background may consider sharing their technical skills with the new First Lego League robotics as well. Student volunteers have been brought to the Hub through EPICS projects, academic clubs, and Greek life. The Hartford Hub's website provides a link for signing up as well as training videos and guidelines for volunteers.

For students who want to incorporate volunteering at the Hartford Hub into their studies, there are Dr. Ware's classes and research group. The HONR 29900: Urban Youth Advocacy and HONR 39900: Well-Being courses focus on increasing the interactions between Purdue students and the Lafayette community. Students learn about defining and researching well-being while directly applying that knowledge in a project with a community partner, one of which has been the FCDC's Hartford Hub. Students practice skills such as gathering data through surveys, interviews, and direct observation and recording it in a research log. They then apply methods of qualitative data analysis to help community partners find solutions. HONR classes are available to all Purdue students with a GPA of at least 3.00, and the Ware research group is open to all students as well. The group works to help empower the urban poor populations of Lafayette to improve their quality of life and well-being using similar research methods and working with community partners such as FCDC and the Hartford Hub.

### Takeaways

The Hartford Hub is a community center that has been effective at enriching the lives of Lincoln Neighborhood residents and volunteers that help run the programs. Purdue students have volunteered in different ways, many through Dr. Ware's research group and courses, and there are still many opportunities for students to get involved. Purdue students looking for opportunities to volunteer should consider the Hartford Hub to develop their skills working with children in a constructive and

fun environment. Additionally, Dr. Ware's research group and honors courses can give students valuable experience in using qualitative and participatory action research to better understand and impact our communities. Volunteering at the Hub gives students context for their own community as a part of the Greater Lafayette area, encouraging them to take ownership of their time spent here. Constantly surrounded by fellow college students, we can forget how valuable our time and friendship can be to others. By volunteering locally at the Hartford Hub, students can diversify and enrich their Purdue experience by taking an opportunity to develop themselves and have fun developing relationships with their neighbors.

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### EPICS Urban Farming: Bringing Sustainable, Fresh Food to Gary, Indiana

Elijah Klein (*First-Year Engineering*)

#### Student Author Bio Sketch

**Elijah Klein** is a freshman pursuing Computer Engineering at Purdue University. He intends to work in industry on laptop technology after graduation. He joined Engineering Projects in Community Service (EPICS) to gain career experience and has been a part of the Urban Farming team for a semester. In this article, he describes his experiences working to design a sustainable urban farming solution.

#### Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) tracks food access based on several factors including accessibility to sources of healthy food, family income, vehicle availability, average neighborhood income, and availability of public transportation. The reason they track these factors is to track indicators of food deserts, as well as to track the expansion or contraction of food deserts. Most of Gary, Indiana fits these factors at half mile and 10-mile tract measurements. This means that for 33% of the population, there is at minimum a half mile to the nearest grocery store in urban areas, and over 10 miles in rural areas (Food Access Research Atlas,