

Thrive Laurens County Community Listening Session Report

Joanna, Laurens County, SC



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Thrive Laurens County

Community Listening Session Report – Joanna

Date: November 18, 2025

Location: Christ Central Ministries, Joanna, SC

Focus: Healthy Eating and Active Living

Overview: Thrive Laurens County Coalition hosted a community listening session to collect input from residents on improving access to healthy foods, promoting healthier eating habits, and increasing opportunities for physical activity and active living to improve health outcomes. The shared insights from community members will directly inform the coalition's action plan as part of the Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas five-year initiative to improve health across Laurens County.

Discussion Objectives

1. **Objective 1:** Understand what resources are available to community members for healthy foods and physical activity, identify gaps, and determine how the coalition can support or expand programs, services, and locations to promote healthy foods and physical activity.
2. **Objective 2:** Understand the barriers and other general factors that influence or impact healthy behaviors, such as healthy eating and physical activity/active living.
3. **Objective 3:** Collect ideas and suggestions from participants on creating new opportunities and improving access to healthy foods and physical activity within their community.

Discussion Questions

1. **Access & Availability** – Where do you and your family usually get healthy foods and find places to be active?
2. **Helpful Resources** – What programs, places, or resources have helped your family eat healthier or be more active?
3. **Barriers & Challenges** – What makes it difficult to eat healthy foods or be physically active?
4. **Ideas for the Future** – Imagine a healthier community. What changes or partnerships would make healthy eating and active living easier for everyone?

Access, Availability and Helpful Resources

Healthy Eating/Healthy Food Access

Most Joanna residents travel out of town to neighboring areas to access healthy foods and groceries. Specific areas mentioned include Clinton, Laurens, and Newberry (next county).

Grocery Stores

- Walmart (Clinton, Laurens)
- Food Lion (Clinton)
- BI-LO (surrounding areas)
- Dollar General (Joanna) - limited fresh produce options
- Ingles

Farmers' Markets/Roadside Markets

- **Laurens County Farmer's Market:** Located in Laurens on the square with spring/summer seasonal operation.
- **Hopewell Church Road Market**
- **Lush Farms**
- **Heritage Fields Farmers' Market:** Located in Newberry County (close to the Laurens/Newberry County line), operating on Saturdays from 1 pm -5 pm. The location is newly open. Many community members were not aware this was open.
- **Facilitator's Note:** All farmers' markets mentioned require transportation to access.

Programs and Services

Emergency Food Resources

- **Christ Central Ministries** (session host location): Christ Central has a food distribution on the third Saturday of every month. **Share Day** (name of distribution) provides food boxes, clothing, and sometimes household furnishings (depends on donations received as to what is available). If food or other donations are received throughout the week, Christ Central will give out those supplies. Emergency food available throughout the month as donations allow.
- **Blessing Boxes:** There are five locations throughout Joanna community that have Blessing Boxes are a community run outdoor pantry where community members supply nonperishable items (food, household or hygiene) for other community members in need to receive. Locations across Joanna are:
 - Christ Central Ministries
 - Joanna Woodson Elementary School

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	○ Dollar General ○ Tabernacle Breakthrough ○ Additional location in community (unnamed) FoodShare Program • About 12 participants were aware of FoodShare. The SC Empowerment Center in Gray Court serves as the hub for Laurens County. When asked, participants expressed interest in potentially bringing FoodShare to Joanna, with Christ Central Ministries as possible distribution location. Gardens (Community/Personal) • Raised Bed Community Garden: Eight to ten raised beds are located at Christ Central managed by the local United Way. Produce is given out free based on the year-round planting. The United Way works with two master gardeners to help support their community gardening initiative. As funding is identified, the United Way plans to potentially increase around the community. • Participants note the need and space for more raised beds at Christ Central Ministries. Limited volunteer support noted as a key challenge for sustaining the garden. • There was a previous community garden in Joanna however, it was unable to be sustained.
<i>Physical Activity/Active Living</i>	Session participants emphasized the need for more accessible and sustained recreation opportunities, highlighting transportation barriers, limited programming for youth and seniors, and challenges maintaining community engagement in existing activities. Parks & Outdoor Spaces • Joanna Park is located next to Joanna Woodson Elementary School with basketball hoops, walking track, splash pad, and playground equipment. ○ Gravel access path noted as barrier for wheelchair users and those with mobility challenges. Session participants noted a grass alternative entrance is available. ○ Joanna Park noted as safe during daylight hours but there are safety concerns after dark. • Musgrove Mill State Historic Site - Four miles of hiking trails, lake, waterfall (6-7 miles from Joanna) ○ \$3 adults, \$1.50 seniors, \$1 children ○ Free library pass available (up to 15 people per vehicle, no fines on library card required) ○ Closes at 6pm (limits evening access)

	Indoor Facilities • Christ Central gymnasium is available for basketball and recreation but underutilized by community. The gym previously had workout equipment, but it is no longer available. ○ No air conditioning limits use specifically in the summer. ○ Occasional basketball games are held in the gym by community members. • The YMCA is in Clinton which requires transportation. Walking Trails • Presbyterian College has a walking trail open to public, approximately 4-6 miles from Joanna but requires transportation. Other Comments • Walking in neighborhoods and back roads was stated as the most common activity. • A resident mentioned the free United Way outdoor workout equipment, but this is in Clinton.
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Barriers and Challenges

<i>Healthy Eating/Healthy Foods Access</i>	Like the Gray Court community, Joanna session participants noted that most available services and programs are concentrated in the City of Laurens, requiring reliable transportation to access. Specific barriers mentioned included: • Distance and transportation. No grocery stores in Joanna requires travel to other areas of the county (Clinton, Laurens) and sometimes the next county over (Newberry). • Affordability. Session participants state the cost of healthy fresh foods can be a factor to purchasing and consuming healthy foods with many opting for “inexpensive” processed foods. • Food Preparation Challenges. Limited knowledge of healthy meal preparation, especially simple one-pot meals. Seniors face physical challenges cutting and preparing fresh produce. • Lack of tools and equipment. Session participants note there are some community members who do not have can openers for canned goods, knives and cutting tools for fresh produce, functioning stoves (some cooking on single burner and/ or struggle to have consistent power/electricity for cooking).
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<i>Physical Activity/Active Living</i>	Session participants identified several challenges that make it difficult for community members to stay active or use existing recreation spaces. • Time and energy. Work and family responsibilities leave little time or energy for physical activity. • Cost keeps many families from joining sports or recreation programs. • Transportation. Most organized activities, fitness facilities, and recreation programs located outside Joanna. • Limited options for organized activities, programs and recreation. Very few organized recreation activities or sports programs for youth or adults within Joanna. Residents travel to Clinton for organized recreation. • Youth engagement. Technology (phones, video games) competing with outdoor activity. Limited organized youth programs in Joanna. • Limited Awareness. Many residents are unaware of current programs, or recreation resources that are available including the free state park library passes • Seasonal limitations. Earlier darkness in fall/winter reduces outdoor activity time. • Safety while walking and participating in physical activity are a concern for some community members. Many session participants stated feeling uncomfortable using available parks alone specifically in the afternoon/evening. • Limited street lighting also mentioned as a safety concern especially in the fall and winter months.
Ideas for the Future	
<i>Imagine a healthier community. What changes or partnerships would make healthy eating and active</i>	Locations • Advocate for a new grocery store or market in Joanna. This is a top request, of session participants. Participants acknowledge the time and effort this could take and expressed interest in learning about community supported or developed models. • Dollar General Market Expansion. Revisit adding fresh produce section at the local Dollar General. Participants heard this was planned previously and suggest engaging town/county council to advocate. • Bring the FoodShare program to Joanna. Participants expressed an interest in establishing a FoodShare distribution at Christ Central Ministries. Community Gardens • Strengthen existing gardens at Christ Central. Increase volunteer base for the current United Way raised bed gardens at Christ Central. • Develop an “Adopt-a-Bed” program. The program could be modeled after "Adopt-a-Highway" where individuals, families, churches, or community groups adopt specific raised beds or garden sections for maintenance in the community garden. • Partner with the Clemson Extension program to host a Master Gardener to teach classes in Joanna.

living easier for everyone?

- **Develop a Garden Club.** The garden club could be modeled after the Little Red Hen Garden Club (Roanoke, Virginia). The Little Red Hen Garden Club is a volunteer-based program where members contribute 5 hours/week in exchange for produce share.

Education & Resources

- **Provide healthy meal preparation classes** focusing on one-pot meals and simple recipes requiring minimal tools and preparation.
- Adapt cooking classes for seniors with mobility challenges that make food prep difficult.

Organized Activities & Programs

- **Provide chair exercises and adaptive fitness classes** to meet people at their mobility level, including seated exercises for those with physical limitations.
- **Support Community Walking Groups.** Walking groups could be community wide or segmented by groups like senior "chitchat" walking group or youth walking group for social connection and safety.
- **Explore bringing recreational activities** such as pickleball, volleyball, organized basketball, line dancing and aerobic classes to the community.
- **Increase youth specific programs** (boxing, basketball leagues, football, wilderness survival classes) to engage youth and reduce screen time.
- **Teach educational outdoor classes,** wilderness survival and outdoor skills.

Improve Existing Facilities

- **Utilize Christ Central Ministries** to increase physical activity programming and provide indoor walking space, particularly in winter months and when weather limits outdoor activity.
- **Improve Joanna Park accessibility** by adding a paved path alternative instead of gravel path.
- **Explore adding outdoor workout equipment** to Joanna (like United Way equipment in Clinton).

Community Engagement & Support

- **Increase awareness about existing resources** (state park library passes, available programs, gym availability).
- **Tap into local organizations** (churches, schools, civic groups) to adopt programs and increase volunteer recruitment and sustainability.
- **Leverage Christ Central Ministries** as community hub and information center.
- **Utilize social media** (Facebook Live) and word-of-mouth networks for program promotion.
- **Partner with schools for youth volunteer hours and engagement** to sustain community programs around healthy eating and physical activity.

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Communication & Outreach Strategy

Participants identified effective communication channels for reaching Joanna residents:

- Facebook Live events: Most effective digital outreach. Community champion shares information through live videos that get widely shared.
- **Christ Central Ministries Network:** Christ Central Ministries is connected to schools, churches, DSS, care centers, and community organizations.

Recommendation: For coalition outreach to Joanna, provide information to Christ Central for distribution through their established network and support Facebook Live announcements through community champion.

Other Discussion Points/Insights:

- Christ Central Ministries is mentioned as a key resource and hub for community members. This sentiment was echoed by many session attendees.
- Community Champion Volunteer was identified as a key information resource in the Joanna community. The champion provides information and updates to community members through Facebook and Facebook livestreams.
- The overarching theme was that residents must travel outside Joanna and often outside Laurens County to access healthy food and recreational opportunities, creating significant barriers for those without reliable transportation.
- Participants address the multilayered effects of barriers. Transportation access, food affordability, fuel costs, and limited employment opportunities are deeply interconnected, creating layered challenges that reinforce one another.
 - Residents described a persistent “cycle of poverty” in which securing employment requires reliable transportation, fuel, insurance, and a valid driver’s license; however, income from employment is needed to afford those very necessities, leaving many unable to enter or sustain the workforce.
- Participants expressed a strong sentiment that “Joanna doesn’t exist” in Laurens County, citing minimal county presence, limited investment, and scarce resources directed toward the community.

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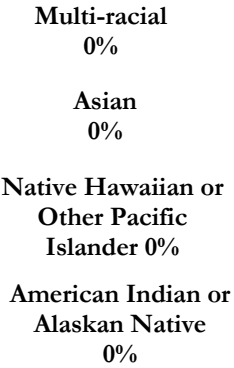
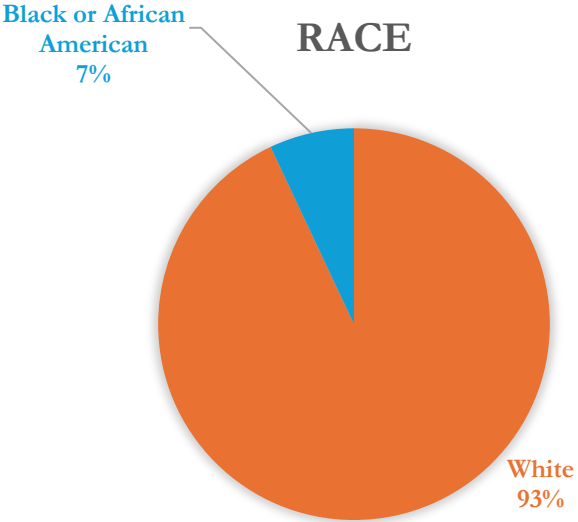
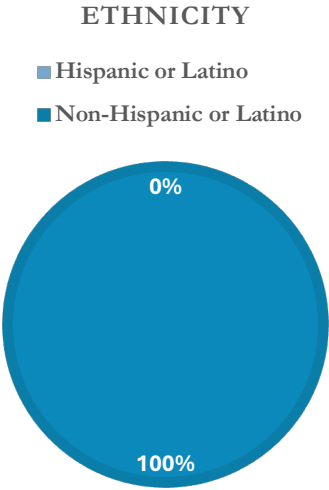
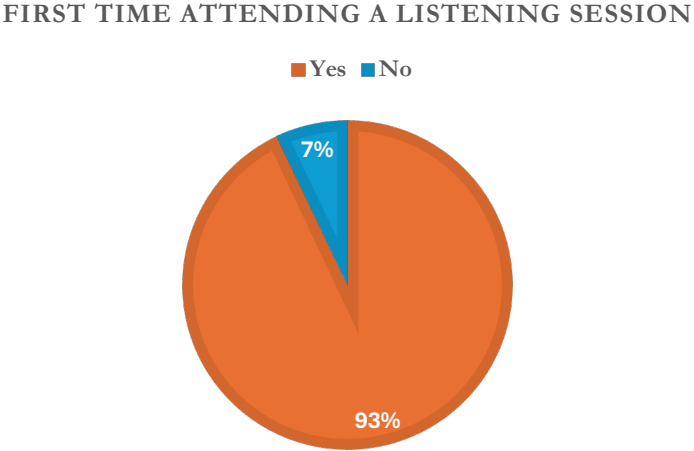
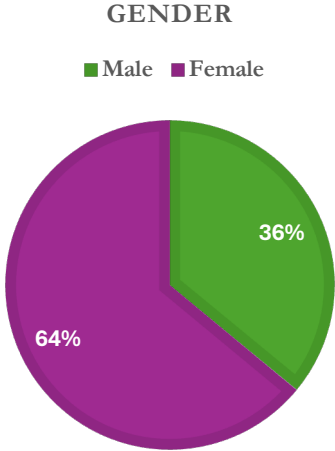
Participant Profile

Upon arrival at the listening session, community members were asked to complete a demographic survey. Below are the results.

Total Responses: 15
Age Range: 14–78 years
Median Age: 53 years

Participants were from a range of cities and ZIP codes across Laurens County and nearby areas, including 29351, 29355, 29325, and 29108.

**The number of responses is lower than the actual number of session participants. **



End Report