

FROM COMMUNITY CONNECTION TO PUBLIC IMPACT

How becoming a Community Health Worker helped me discover my purpose



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THE ROLE THAT CHANGED THE DIRECTION OF MY LIFE

In 2023, I accepted a position at HealthNet as a Community Health Worker. At the time, I had no idea what a Community Health Worker was or how deeply that role would shape the direction of my life. I joined a brand new program with a team of four, and we were learning together as we built something new. None of us were certified, and we did not even know certification existed until my manager discovered the Indiana Community Health Workers Association's training program. I have always believed that if I am trusted with a role, I owe it to the people I serve to learn as much as I can about how to do that work well. I enrolled not simply to earn a credential, but because I wanted to understand the profession I had stepped into and help set a standard for the Community Health Workers who would come after me.

What I found through the certification program was much bigger than a course. The virtual format was flexible, but the conversations were powerful and deeply connected to real life. We shared resources, talked about organizations working together across our communities, discussed the public health challenges we were witnessing, and challenged one another to think about how our work could create awareness, prevention, access, change, and hope. I began to understand that the value of a Community Health Worker is not found in one task or job description. It is found in trust: the ability to meet people where they are, recognize barriers that systems often overlook, connect people to resources, and help communities believe that better outcomes are possible.

After earning my certification, I knew I wanted to do more than carry the CHW title; I wanted to advocate for the credibility of the profession. I joined the INCHWA Advisory Board, where I had the opportunity to help create the CHW Advocacy Toolkit. We created it to give Community Health Workers language, evidence, and practical tools to explain the value of their work, advocate for their communities, and strengthen recognition of the profession across Indiana. That experience taught me that advocacy is not only speaking for people. It is helping people and communities recognize the power, knowledge, and solutions they already possess.

Community health work also gave me the courage to return to school. The people I met through outreach, the inequities I witnessed, and the gaps I saw between services and the people who needed them helped me find my passion for public health, prevention, education, and systems level change. That foundation eventually led me into my current work as a Public Health Investigator and Advisor for the State of Indiana, where I support local health departments in strengthening STI and HIV prevention, disease intervention, clinic development, linkage to care, training, and community partnerships. The title changed and the scope grew, but the heart of the work never left me: listen first, build trust, connect people to what they need, and leave communities stronger than you found them.

"I thought I was accepting a job. I was really discovering my purpose."

I could not see the whole road in 2023. I only knew I wanted to serve people well. Looking back, every step connects: the CHW certification, the board service, the advocacy work, returning to school, public health leadership, and now graduate study. My journey reminds me that purpose does not always arrive as a grand announcement. Sometimes it begins with an unfamiliar job title, a willingness to learn, and one opportunity that asks you to believe your work can matter. Community health work gave me more than a career foundation. It taught me that when we invest in people who know, love, and serve their communities, we do more than improve health. We create leaders, advocates, and possibilities that can reach far beyond where they began.

WHEN PURPOSE OPENS DOORS

My education and career began to grow from the same question that first took root in my CHW work: How can I use what I know to make prevention more accessible before a crisis happens? I carried that question back to school and into a public health marketing portfolio focused on expanding rapid STI testing and prevention for young adults through IU's campus health center. The idea came directly from what community outreach had taught me: pay attention to the needs people are showing us and create solutions that meet them where they are.

The project earned a Creative Expression Award and helped place my work on the radar of graduate programs at IU. By the time I completed my bachelor's studies in 2026, I had also been accepted into Morehouse School of Medicine's Master of Public Health program and received opportunities to pursue graduate study at IU.

CHOOSING TO HELP BUILD

Among those opportunities was a newly launched Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Systems. I chose to become part of its first cohort because there was something meaningful about helping shape a program for the students who will come after us. That decision felt connected to where my journey began: joining something new, learning alongside others, and using my experience to help build a stronger path forward.

