

A Place to Grow:

**NUTRITIOUS FOOD, BETTER HEALTH,
STRONGER COMMUNITIES**



**How food, wellness and action
rebuild lives and restore community**

By Maureen A. Jung, Ph.D.

**Profiles
of nine
programs
of the Local
Food and
Nutrition
Education
Channel:
2008-2012**

“ **Social fabric is created
one room at a time.** ”

–Peter Block

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Introduction

Obesity and diet-related chronic diseases have become severe economic and health threats to both adults and children, increasing the cost of health care and impacting quality of life for families and communities. Changing eating habits, adopting healthy behaviors, and understanding the influence of the environment on obesity rates is critical to reversing these negative trends. However, access to healthy foods is still a barrier to adopting healthier life styles for low-income Californians. *The Network for a Health California (Network)* offers solutions to this problem with effective approaches to nutrition education and obesity prevention.

In *A Place to Grow*, we explore some of these answers, looking at nine nutrition education projects funded by the *Network* through the Local Food and Nutrition Education (LFNE) Channel. These projects are examples of innovative, community-based approaches to reach specific low-income individuals and families.¹

A Place to Grow looks at the role of community engagement as a vehicle to empower people and produce sustainable improvements in community and individual health.² Our purpose with this book is to share lessons, models, tools, and best practices with others who share an interest in creating healthier places.

This book is intended for community-based nonprofit organizations; local, regional, state and federal government agencies; schools and day care facilities; youth, recreational, and environmental groups; gardening advocates; health providers; food justice advocates, and more. It is for those seeking positive examples of community members and organizations working and learning together. It is for those interested in how community engagement promotes health by fostering deeper connections between people, organizations, and communities.

A Place to Grow is a call to action. Investing in community-based nutrition education and obesity prevention programs requires a long-term commitment. While progress is being made, much more remains to be done. Now is the time to get involved.

Rosanne Stephenson

Rosanne Stephenson
Chief, Program Development Section

¹ Local Food and Nutrition Education Channel Request for Applications, FFY 2011, December 2010.

² National Institutes of Health, "Executive Summary," *Principles of Community Engagement*, second edition, 2011, http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pce_execsummary.html.

Chapter 1

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION: PROMOTING HEALTHIER CHOICES TO LOW-INCOME CALIFORNIANS

Whether we are rich or poor, the healthcare crisis affects all of us. Rising rates of obesity and chronic disease threaten individuals, families, and communities across the nation. However, some groups have been harder hit than others. In California, obesity and diabetes are higher among Latinos, African Americans and American Indians than among whites or Asians, and disproportionately affect the poorest Californians.³

To build a sustainable future, we must find ways to reverse these trends. But we don't have much time. If we fail to act effectively in the face of this crisis, we risk a continuation of the obesity epidemic driving up healthcare costs and diminishing the quality of life for families and communities.

Despite the size and complexity of this challenge, nutrition education and obesity prevention efforts by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) through the *Network* offer concrete reasons for hope. In marked contrast to national trends, recent research shows significant improvements in two key areas of health behavior:⁴

- **Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables.** The proportion of very low-income (< \$15,000 per year) adults who consumed the recommended 5-a-day servings of fruits and vegetables nearly doubled, rising from 24 percent in 1997 to 46 percent in 2007.⁵
- **Physical activity also improved.** The proportion of very low-income (< \$15,000 per year) adults meeting the recommended level of moderate to vigorous physical activity—at least 30 minutes a day for at least five days per week—grew from 36 percent in 2001 to 46 percent in 2007.⁶

These achievements demonstrate that, even in a state so large and diverse as California, the right strategies can make a big difference in people's lives. Moreover, these public health programs reach the low-income populations most vulnerable to food insecurity, obesity, and diabetes. That is good news, but it's not good enough.

These improvements must be sustainable over the long run, and they must reach more people. What elements go into building successful public health programs that change behavior and reduce the risk of chronic disease? That's the billion-dollar question.

³ Allison L. Diamant, Susan H. Babey, Joelle Wolstein and Malia Jones, "Obesity and Diabetes: Two Growing Epidemics in California," *Health Policy Research Brief*, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, August 2010.

⁴ Jennifer Gregson, "Commentary from the *Network* for a Healthy California," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 43:4S2, July/August 2011, S49.

⁵ S.B. Sugerman, S.B. Foerster, J. Gregson, A. Linares, M. Hudes, "California Adults Increase Fruit and Vegetable Consumption from 1997-2007," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 43:4S 2, S96-S103, July/August 2011.

⁶ California Department of Public Health, *Network* for a Healthy California, "2007 California Dietary Practices Survey Data Tables," February 2011. Available at: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/2007CDPSDataTable.aspx.

What follows is a narrative on effective approaches to improving public health, focused on the Californians most vulnerable to food insecurity, obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. The purpose of this book is three-fold:

- To discuss the approaches and strategies employed by the *Network's* Local Food and Nutrition Education (LFNE) Channel to help community organizations develop successful nutrition education projects.
- To present profiles of nine projects that offer a window into the ways local organizations connect with community members, build capacity, and work toward sustainability.
- To issue a call to action. We urgently need to do more, and we have good models to follow. Use these strategies to build on the outcomes already achieved. Get involved in restoring health in your community.

Rather than a research study or technical report, what follows is a narrative on effective approaches to improving public health, focused on the Californians most vulnerable to obesity and chronic disease. In the process of providing nutrition education and preventing obesity, these programs add capacity and enhance the sustainability of changes in individuals, organizations and communities.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS MOBILIZE RESOURCES

The *Network* was formed to develop innovative partnerships that empower low-income Californians to eat more fruits and vegetables, increase their physical activity, and improve their food security—essential first steps in preventing obesity.⁷ The *Network* leads a statewide movement of nearly 150 local, state, and national partner organizations and agencies working together to improve the health

status of millions of low-income California parents and children.

Network-funded programs and activities are delivered through multiple channels. These include grants and contracts, advertising and social marketing campaigns, development and testing of educational resources, training and technical assistance to community partners, administrative oversight, and applied research and evaluation.⁸

In 2006, the *Network* launched the LFNE Channel, which includes community-based projects connected with local food systems, including food banks, farmers' markets, food justice and anti-hunger groups, as well as other nonprofit organizations that provide services to low-income families and the homeless. Target audiences include Californians eligible for or receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). LFNE projects are designed to reach them where they live, work, play, learn, and worship.

To ease implementation of these projects, optimize outcomes, build capacity and promote sustainable improvements, The LFNE Channel:

- Provides support, training and technical assistance, including assistance in evaluation research.
- Shares promising practices, effective nutrition education tools, materials, and evaluation results.
- Facilitates technology transfer among contractors through Regional Collaboratives and other stakeholder meetings.⁹

The training, support, and oversight provided to the community-based organizations leads to better communication with partners, more efficient project implementation and better project results. These benefits build capacity that enables staff, participants, and organizations to take on larger challenges.

⁷ To learn more about the *Network*, visit <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/pages/AboutUs.aspx>

⁸ Op. cit., Gregson, "Commentary," for an overview of the *Network's* background, progress, and future directions.

⁹ Source: California Department of Public Health, Local Food and Nutrition Education Channel webpage: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/LocalFoodandNutritionEducation.aspx>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EMPOWERS BETTER HEALTH CHOICES

The *Network* has long recognized that community-driven approaches are most effective in creating real and lasting change. As organizations expert Peter Block explains:

*“If we continue to invest in individuals as the primary target of change, we will spend our primary energy on this and never fully invest in communities. In this way, individual transformation comes at the cost of community.”*¹⁰

Instead, as the 2010 California Obesity Prevention Plan (COPP) pointed out in its case for action:

*“The obesity epidemic is a multi-faceted issue that reflects changes in our social, economic, and built environments over many years. It is an issue that will require innovative actions, a shared vision, and a collaborative approach to resolve.”*¹¹

A recent, in-depth publication from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) reaffirms the efficacy of community-engagement strategies for improving the health of a community and its members.¹² As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), community engagement refers to:

*“...the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting [their] wellbeing... It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices.”*¹³



This approach is based on the recognition that our social, economic, and physical environments shape individual health and health behaviors. Broad-based health improvements will not occur without community improvements to support them. Core principles of community engagement include fairness, justice, empowerment, participation, and self-determination.¹⁴

These principles guide the LFNE Channel in its work with community-based organizations and other partners and collaborators. Projects are encouraged to draw from evidence-based approaches that have demonstrated success in both research and in practice. Key LFNE strategies include:

- Improving access: Collaborating with activities to increase access to healthier foods and fresh produce through community-supported agriculture, such as school or community gardens.
- Social support: Encompassing a wide range of relationship and capacity-building activities, social support includes developing partnerships and collaborations. Examples include:
 - Peer-to-peer education interventions, which empower youth and adults to share their knowledge about nutrition and healthier behavior with others in their community.

¹⁰ Block, Peter, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco, 2008), p. 5.

¹¹ California Obesity Prevention Program, *California Obesity Prevention Plan*, California Department of Public Health, 2010.

¹² National Institutes of Health, *Principles of Community Engagement*, 2nd edition, United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2011. Available at: http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pdf/PCE_Report_508_FINAL.pdf

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

- Empowering youth and adults to engage in community change. This is a particularly powerful strategy because it refocuses authority in the hands of people who can best shape their communities.¹⁵
- Developing culturally-appropriate partnerships within minority and limited-English proficient communities. Focusing on a community's gifts and resources, rather than on the problems and fears, leads to greater opportunities for leverage and to more profound, longer-lasting changes.¹⁶
- Evaluation: Incorporating ongoing project evaluation that involves community organizations and their members, to ensure more effective project implementation and better project outcomes.

The LFNE Channel and its community-based partners work together to accomplish more with less by sharing resources, knowledge, strategies, and outcomes for the betterment of communities across California. Due to the grant size and spending restrictions, these contractors often rely on multiple funding sources to support separate project elements. Volunteers, in-kind donations, and other cost-reduction strategies help hold down costs.

In working closely with these community-based organizations funded by *Network* contracts, the LFNE Channel acts as a catalyst, providing seed money that enables these organizations to add nutrition education and activity projects that enrich lives in the communities they serve. The LFNE Channel enables these contractors to build capacity in their organizations, effectively allowing communities to restore themselves.

* * *

The following chapters look briefly at nine *Network*-funded LFNE Channel projects. The connections between community organization and its members made it possible to develop nutrition-education and activity projects to focus on the specific challenges they confronted. Each contractor also developed a constellation of partnerships and collaborations to make their programs possible.

These project profiles are offered as models of how local organizations work to improve the health of their communities. Ideally, they will serve as practical examples for others interested in promoting better health choices, preventing obesity and chronic diseases, and improving wellness in communities everywhere.

¹⁵ Op. cit., Block, *Communities*, p. 69.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

Chapter 2

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

By facilitating community-engaged health promotion, LFNE projects have transformed *Network* goals into reality for some low-income Californians. Now is the time to do more.

Despite increases in fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity, obesity and diabetes still threaten families and communities statewide. Obesity rose nearly 18 percent between 2001 and 2007, to more than 6 million people.¹⁷ During that same period, diabetes increased over 25 percent in just six years, to affect over two million Californians.

These statistics seem grim, yet they do not tell the whole story. Obesity and diabetes disproportionately affect the poor, Latinos, African Americans, and American Indians.¹⁸ Among Latino adults in California, for example, obesity increased 45 percent - from 20 percent to 29 percent - between 2001 and 2009.¹⁹ In what may seem like a paradox, in 2009, overweight and obese adults reported higher levels of food insecurity than adults who were not overweight.²⁰ In this same year, Latinos reported significantly higher levels of food insecurity than other ethnic groups.²¹

“GOOD COOKING/BUENA COCINA” TURNS LA FOOD DESERT INTO NEIGHBORHOOD OASIS

“Good Cooking/Buena Cocina”
Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los
Angeles, Los Angeles

Despite the State’s role as a leading agricultural producer,²² California has a food insecurity rate of 17.1 percent, above the national average of 16.1 percent—meaning a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life.²³ About 25 percent of food-insecure Californians, over 1.6 million people, are in Los Angeles County.

Good nutrition and physical activity are two keys to better health, but many LA residents lack access to affordable, fresh produce and to safe places for play and recreation. In many neighborhoods, liquor stores and fast-food restaurants out number grocery stores. Some areas have no grocery stores at all.

Amid the city’s food deserts and blighted urban landscapes, Sustainable Economic Enterprises of LA (SEE-LA) is transforming the lives of families and communities. SEE-LA reaches CalFresh-eligible residents through programs in schools, community

¹⁷ Op. cit., Diamant, “Obesity and Diabetes,” p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Network for a Healthy California*, “Key Facts Highlighting Barriers Latino Adults Face to Latino Fact Sheet,” 2009, p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² USDA. Economic Research Service. Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/faqs.aspx#10>

²³ Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap, Food Insecurity in Your County. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>

centers, WIC clinics, and farmers' markets. Through partnerships with the LA Unified School District, New Economics for Women, and the Hollywood Community Housing Corporation, SEE-LA brings a variety of resources to the communities it serves.

SEE-LA operates eight certified farmers' markets, with sites in Hollywood, South Central, Watts, Echo Park, Crenshaw, Canoga Park, Atwater Village, and East Hollywood. These markets supply fresh, local, seasonal produce directly to poor communities. That makes them ideal locations to promote interest in healthy cooking classes. With funding from the *Network*, SEE-LA launched Good Cooking/Buena Cocina," a series of six workshops that focus on healthy recipes for busy cooks on limited budgets. Classes are often taught in both English and Spanish.

Good Cooking/Buena Cocina workshops are led by SEE-LA staff. Participants learn practical nutrition information and get practical tips for stretching their food budget. They also get peer support for making positive lifestyle changes. Following completion of the workshop series, many participants continue to shop at SEE-LA farmers' markets, buying fresh fruits and vegetables using CalFresh benefits and other federal/state nutrition assistance.

Some participants, after completing the series, want to get involved in bringing the program to more members of their community. They may become peer educators, "Champions for Change," who receive additional instruction in nutrition and cooking, along with a small stipend for sharing their knowledge with others in their community.

Culturally appropriate physical activities are also part of SEE-LA programs. Zumba, fitness dancing that incorporates salsa, hip hop and mambo dance moves, attracts dozens of participants every week. They have fun, socialize, and get healthier with Zumba, a part of the project supported by outside funding. Zumba, farmers' markets, and nutrition classes are helping bring life back to communities. Many participants continue to shop at SEE-LA farmers' markets, buying fresh fruits and vegetables using CalFresh benefits and other federal/state nutrition assistance.

Fatima Q. is a perfect example of how SEE-LA's classes change lives. Attending SEE-LA's nutrition-education classes and learning about the connections between food and health showed Fatima that change was possible. She began seeing improvements in her own life. Her enthusiasm led her to work for a year as a SEE-LA Champion for Change peer nutrition educator. After the year ended, Fatima and her husband continued to lead free Zumba classes for fun, exercise, socialization and better lives for their community members.

At the end of each six-week Good Cooking/Buena Cocina series, class members gather for a potluck meal. Each brings a traditional dish to share with the group. Some bring new recipes they've created, healthier versions of the cultural foods they love. Sharing food together shows respect for culture and for people, and honors the changes participants are making.

SEE-LA's programs have attracted funding and support from both public and private sources; from local politicians and agencies to Kaiser Permanente, Catholic Healthcare West and the California Association of Food Banks. Training and relationships built as a result of funding from the *Network for a Healthy California* have led to statewide visibility and praise for Good Cooking/Buena Cocina.

"SALSA, SABOR Y SALUD" BUILDS HEALTHY BODIES AND REINFORCES FAMILY VALUES

"Salsa, Sabor y Salud"
New Economics for Women, Los Angeles

Finding fresh healthy foods in downtown LA can be difficult. In the Westlake-Pico Union district, one of LA's more densely populated inner-city neighborhoods, residents face safety issues due to the dozens of gangs operating in the area. Between 73 percent and 85 percent of the residents in this district are Latino and approximately two-thirds were born outside the United States, most commonly in Mexico, El Salvador or Guatemala.²⁴

²⁴ Los Angeles Times, *Mapping LA Project*, using 2000 United States Census data and information from the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and the Southern California Association of Governments. <http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/neighborhood/downtown/>



In California, both obesity and diabetes are more prevalent among Latinos than whites and disproportionately affect the poorest Californians.²⁵ Obesity is a significant risk factor for diabetes; both health conditions are, in turn, significant risk factors for other serious health conditions such as heart disease.²⁶ In 2007 the adult rate of diabetes for Latinos was more than double the rate for whites.²⁷

Into this bleak urban environment, New Economics for Women (NEW) introduced Salsa, Sabor y Salud, a 4-session bilingual program that teaches healthier approaches to cooking and eating, while reinforcing the shared Latino family values that unite residents as a cultural community. Culture became the path to attracting participants and connecting with the community.

Salsa, Sabor y Salud (SSS) promotes life-long healthy behaviors focused on the whole family. Participants range from infants to grandparents. NEW operates on the belief that if even one family member decides to make better food choices, the whole family gains.

NEW partners with schools and parent groups to involve both parents and kids in making healthy choices. Kids come home from school excited and their enthusiasm affects their parents, which makes them more likely to apply the lessons they've

learned. In all, NEW presented the SSS series 42 times, with a total of 1044 participants over the 3 years of the program.²⁸

SSS is designed to help the entire family take small steps toward a healthier way of life. Classes emphasize the importance of eating healthy food and engaging in regular physical activity to boost energy. Both kids and adults learn through cooking demonstrations, preparation of healthy recipes, tips for making better food choices, and lessons about the link between good food and good health.

Best-practices such as interactive nutrition-education classes, physical activities, food preparation, cooking demonstrations, and taste tests are central to the success of SSS. In the final class of this series, a celebration takes place. Participants prepare new or traditional recipes they've altered to use healthier ingredients. Taking time to share food and to talk about the class honors the learning that has taken place. Relationships are strengthened in the process.

NEW's unique approach builds on the Latino cultural values of family, tradition, and common language. The organization recognizes that big changes begin with small steps. Participants, especially mothers, said they enjoyed changing the way they cooked and found it meaningful to adapt their cherished traditional recipes with healthier, fresher ingredients.

In focus group sessions with 135 people who completed the program, participants reported they ate more or continued to try and eat more fruits and vegetables and said they increased their physical activity by an average of at least 45 minutes a week. Some formed neighborhood walking clubs. Overall, participants were working to improve their health behaviors and eating habits and motivating others to do so as well.²⁹ That's progress.

²⁵ Allison L. Diamant, Susan H. Babey, Joelle Wolstein and Malia Jones, "Obesity and Diabetes: Two Growing Epidemics in California," *Health Policy Research Brief*, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, August 2010.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Trends in Diabetes: A Reversible Public Health Crisis," *LA Health*, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, November 2010.

²⁸ New Economics for Women, "Salsa, Sabor y Salud," presentation, LFNE Retro-Spectacular Conference, Sacramento, California, August 2010.

²⁹ New Economics for Women, "Retrospective Report FFY 2009-2011."

Collaborating helped NEW reach local residents. By working through area schools, the organization connects with parents of Westlake-Pico students. St. Vincent's Medical Center provides screenings for BMI, heart rate, and blood sugar levels. NEW has also hosted community health fairs, offering cooking demonstrations, health testing, and other health resources to hundreds of local residents. The "Outcomes" table below shows an increase in healthy behavior reported by SSS program participants. In short, participants reported improvements in many of the promoted behaviors such as eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking more water, and increasing their physical activity. That's making a difference in this community.

As a housing developer, NEW is committed to building relationships with other community organizations and area residents to ensure key programs continue. NEW's experience with Salsa, Sabor y Salud convinced staff that promoting nutrition education and physical activity are central to its mission. Because this program addresses key health issues, increases awareness, and often produces significant health behavior changes, staff at NEW have been inspired to continue the series beyond the end of *Network* funding.

Salsa, Sabor y Salud (SSS) Outcomes³⁰

Significant increases in participants reporting:

- Consuming 3½ to 6½ cups of fruit & vegetables daily
- Preparing recipes using a variety of fruits & vegetables
- Participating in at least 30 min. physical activity every day
- Drink 5-8 cups of water every day

PROMOTING RECOVERY: HEALTHY FOOD AS SELF-CARE AND HEALING

"Soul Food"

Nextcourse, San Francisco

"As a domestic violence victim, it helped me to nurture myself, to start a new journey for both the soul and the body. It's something I'm doing for myself."

"Breakfast...only takes 5 minutes to improve your whole day."

These are some of the lessons learned by participants in "Soul Food," a food and nutrition-education program for women leaving jail or prison and for women escaping domestic violence. In this unique public/private partnership, Nextcourse works with the San Francisco Sheriff's Department (SFSD) Women's Recovery Center (WRC)³¹ as part of its effort to provide services to help participants "achieve and maintain safe and healthy lifestyles."³²

Soul Food created a unique nutrition-education program that taps into the power of food to heal, nurture, and bring people together. Participants in Soul Food are poor, often medically fragile, with low self-esteem and low expectations. Many struggle with substance abuse, mental health, or chronic disease while facing a variety of barriers. Unemployment, limited literacy, lack of job skills, homelessness, trauma, and related problems complicate the lives of many of these women.

To address these issues, Soul Food was developed as a fundamental strategy through which women at the WRC learn the skills necessary to nurture and heal themselves through healthy eating and active lifestyles. Program components of Soul Food include:

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Until recently, this facility was known as the SFSD Women's Reentry Center.

³² Community Works, Women's Reentry Center Brochure, San Francisco Sheriff's Department.

- “Healthy Eating on a Shoestring,” which shows women how to select, prepare, and enjoy fresh, local, seasonal fruits and vegetables for meals and snacks. They discover how to fix tasty, healthy meals even on a hot plate.
- Monthly market walks combining smart grocery shopping trips with physical activity.
- “Nutrition and Recovery,” which involves peer-interns (Champions for Change) helping participants explore the connections between food and mood. They discover good reasons to avoid sugar, learn about nutrition, prepare healthy recipes and engage in physical activity—all of which increases their awareness of the meaning of food in their lives. Because nobody heals alone, participants find that cooking and eating together leads to better health and promotes healing relationships.

In follow-up, participants in Soul Food valued learning the nutritional differences between fresh ingredients and processed foods. They appreciated discovering: “how to read labels,” “high amount of sugar in foods,” and “you can find vitamins in frozen greens.” The women were equally positive about cooking lessons to improve the taste of healthy foods even when cooking on a hot plate; statements like “making broccoli taste good,” “prior to this class, I didn’t know how to make an omelet,” and “I ate dark, leafy greens for the first time” make this clear.³³

The peer nutrition educators called “Champions for Change” are recruited from those who have attended Soul Food classes. These champions are participants who found personal meaning in their experience. They value what they learned and commit to carrying the program to more people. As peer educators, they follow their passion, researching nutrition topics, putting their learning into action through community gardening, creating healthy versions of favorite recipes, acquiring practical job skills and acting as leaders and role

models for others in recovery. All receive additional nutrition training and all prepare and present their own workshops.

Successful community engagement projects change both participants and organizations. Soul Food is no exception. As interest in food and nutrition has grown, the WRC kitchen has been remodeled twice to accommodate Soul Food activities. Nextcourse has also reorganized and begun to manage the WRC’s emergency food bank, which means healthier options are available, even in a crisis.

Soul Food’s Impact: Healthy Thinking Leads to Healthy Behavior³⁴

Healthy Thinking:

Have you noticed any changes in the way you think about food since taking the classes?

- “Cooking is more convenient, less complicated.”
- “How to read nutrition labels.”
- “Include a variety of colors from fresh foods in my diet.”
- “Learned how to prepare to-go foods.”
- “Cooking can be quick and easy.”
- “You are what you eat.”

Healthy Behaviors:

Give one example of how you have chosen a healthy food over an unhealthy food.

- “Instead of fried chicken, I bake it using a recipe from class.”
- “Choosing peanut butter on fruit over granola bar with a high amount of sugar.”
- “Made granola from class recipe instead of buying granola bars.”
- “Now make my own smoothies with kale instead of going to Jamba Juice.”

³³ From focus group results from women who attended a five-week series of Soul Food classes, reported in Nextcourse, “Soul Food,” presentation, LFNE Retro-Spectacular Conference, Sacramento, California, August 2010.

³⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 3

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BUILDS CAPACITY

One of the central goals of the LFNE Channel is to help build the capacity of community-based organizations to address nutrition education and related health issues. Thirteen of the 14 agencies responding to the 2011 Sustainability Report agreed that their affiliation with LFNE enhanced their capacity.³⁵

- Seven contractors reported benefiting from networking opportunities with other organizations. Urban Sprouts, for example, not only connected with other organizations around the state, but also developed partnerships to expand capacity. The Sacramento Hunger Coalition appreciated “lessons learned” from other LFNE contractors, making it possible to further evolve their program. Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles noted, “At [LFNE] meetings and conferences, program staff networked with other projects to learn from their successes and created dialogue on strengthening existing programming. The SEE-LA Good Cooking/Buena Cocina program has gained support and praise with statewide recognition through *Network*-funded outlets.”³⁶
- Six agencies identified the benefits received through LFNE Channel training, including access to a variety of tools, educational materials, and skill-building seminars.³⁷



- Three agencies appreciated gaining experience with evidence-based evaluations, with one contractor commenting on the enhancement of their capacity by “the rigor of the evaluations.” Two other agencies referred to their enhanced credibility after receiving LFNE funding, improving their image when seeking funding from other sources.³⁸

Many community-based organizations have found that the best way to increase capacity is to get help from people in the community. This makes perfect sense; community members are the ones most affected by these organizations and are therefore more motivated to help them succeed. With the proper training and support, these engaged participants can greatly increase an organization’s capacity and efficiency.

³⁵ Denise Perales, Dan Perales and Cheryl Mariscal Hergert. Local Food & Nutrition Education/Food Security Channel Sustainability Study Report, “*Network for a Healthy California*, 2011, p. 43. Unpublished.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

When the community gets involved at this level, the participants benefit as much as the organization does. Community members develop a special pride in their work and a well-earned sense of ownership in the project. Any honoraria they receive underscores their importance, bolsters their self-esteem and encourages them to step up their involvement. Their enthusiasm energizes their peers, which leads to even wider community involvement. And they learn valuable work skills that are transferable to other jobs.

A “BOMB-DIGGITY” APPROACH TO HEALTHY EATING IN RURAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA: YOUTH LEAD THE WAY

“Better Eating, Activity, and Nutrition for Students”
North Coast Opportunities, Inc., Ukiah

Kids play an important role in family nutrition. If they don’t like a food, it’s practically impossible to get them to eat it. If they get excited about a new food, their attitudes affect the whole family.

Children learn fast. “Aprendi que vegetales son buena para usted,” said one first-grade student. (*I learned that vegetables are good for you.*) That’s a crucial message of nutrition education and obesity prevention. Healthy eating is a vital part of preventing serious chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes.

That’s one reason for BEANS—Better Eating, Activity, and Nutrition for Students—founded by North Coast Opportunities, Inc. (NCO) in Ukiah. BEANS focuses on low-income families, at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Many participants come from homes where English is a second language. The group reaches out through after-school programs in Ukiah, Fort Bragg, and Willits to influence the attitudes and behavior of children and teens.

Each year, the program recruits six high school students from each city. The teens sign on to the program for a year to serve as nutrition peer educators. These students have a mission: “to promote health by getting kids to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.”³⁹ They receive a \$1000 honorarium and weekly training in nutrition and cooking for the entire year. As peer educators learn about their own food choices, they expand their palates and hone their cooking skills by preparing ethnic recipes from around the world. At the same time, in preparing and delivering BEANS presentations, they develop strong communication and leadership skills.

To date, 50 peer educators have worked with youth enrolled in after-school programs in Fort Bragg, Ukiah, and Willits. Working in pairs, BEANS peer educators teach younger students about healthy eating. They present interactive hour-long lessons that include a hands-on cooking demonstration, a taste test, a nutrition lesson and a physical activity. The elementary students look forward to their lessons with “cool” BEANS teens, and they love cooking and eating.

Receiving nutrition education from peer educators motivates younger students to become more aware of what they eat and drink. They get interested in the connection between nutrition and health. Peer educators teach younger kids how to choose, prepare, and eat healthier meals. Taste tests are a big hit. Even when kids don’t especially like a new taste, these classes teach them to be more open to trying new foods and encourage them to choose healthier alternatives for snacks and meals.

In a lesson called “Rethink Your Drink,” students taste water flavored with fresh lemon or lime, cucumbers or strawberries. Kids like the flavored waters and their parents appreciate having a healthy, great tasting, inexpensive drink alternative to offer their children.

³⁹ North Coast Opportunities, program staff email communication (10/24/12) on Project Activity 2009-2012.

Both teens and their students expand their horizons as they make and taste healthy foods. After garden and classroom food demonstrations, the children take home healthy recipes for their parents, who discover how to stretch their food budget using fresh local produce. Some parents are surprised to discover their kids **will** eat fresh fruits and vegetables.

Do kids really like fresh, healthy meals? One sixth-grader described the taste of the lettuce-wrapped, all-veggie tacos prepared during a cooking demonstration: “Bomb-diggity!”

BEANS 50 Teen Peer Educators Reach Out⁴⁰

Total students reached in after-school programs	1,211
Total children taught in community programs	174
Total participants in taste test at local farmers’ markets	1,361
Total BEANS outreach contacts	3,571

**Results cover the first 2½ years of the 3-year program*

GARDEN CLASSROOMS GROW HEALTHIER STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

“Urban Sprouts”
Neighborhood Parks Council, San Francisco

“Our gardens help students become more engaged in school and connect with food, the environment, and each other.” –Staff member, Urban Sprouts⁴¹

The Urban Sprouts program was created to increase fruit and vegetable consumption by low-income youth and adults in southeastern San Francisco neighborhoods. In this program, school gardens function as hands-on classrooms for

students and families to learn and grow together. The school gardens encourage physical activity and expand access to fresh produce in an urban area rife with liquor stores and fast-food restaurants.

Urban Sprouts developed garden-based nutrition programs at five public middle and high schools. In addition to working with students, the project also included parent-leadership groups to provide parents and guardians with nutrition information and to improve food access. The program is based on a specific learning model developed by Michelle Ratclife, Ph.D., cofounder of Urban Sprouts. The model guides planning, intervention activities, and evaluations. Three primary interventions are involved:

- Garden-based nutrition education and physical activity.** Students participate in Urban Sprouts over a 20-week period. That’s enough time to plant, nurture, harvest, and eat produce fresh from the school garden. Student lessons also included physical activity and fitness goal-setting. Partner schools integrated the Urban Sprouts program into their science classes. Most teaching materials were drawn from *Nutrition to Grow On* (California Department of Education), *The Growing Classroom* (Life Lab Science), and *EatFit* (University of California).
- Summer Program.** In collaboration with Garden for the Environment, a community demonstration garden, students seeking additional experience were able to volunteer for a 40-hour summer session to learn more about nutrition, gardening, and waste diversion, healthy eating, and sustainable agriculture. The Summer Program provides a team-building and youth empowerment experience. The session culminates with student presentations and take-home kits to share their learning with family and friends.

⁴⁰ North Coast Opportunities, program staff email communication (10/25/12) on project activity 2009-2012.

⁴¹ Neighborhood Parks Council, “Urban Sprouts San Francisco, California FFY2011,” p. 1.

- **Farmers in Residence.** Parents interested in gardening and learning more about food and nutrition are recruited as Farmers in Residence for the school garden. They receive additional training and develop classes to share their knowledge with other parents and guardians. They get people talking about the link between food and health and about how to provide better nutrition for their families. In the process, these parents gain confidence in themselves and build stronger relationships between school and family.

Urban Sprouts changes student behavior. After participating in Urban Sprouts programs, students reported higher levels of fruit and vegetable consumption and increased involvement in physical activities.⁴² Students who participated in focus groups to evaluate the programs described what they learned in their own words:

“Instead of me drinking soda, I make fresh orange juice.”

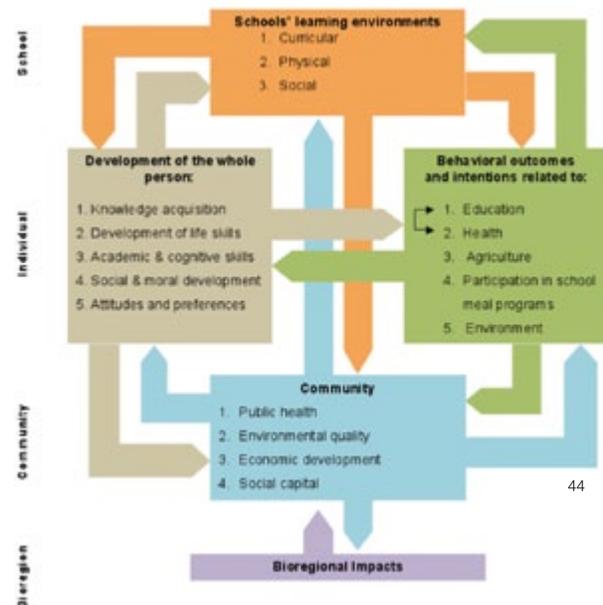
“Eat a little bit more organic stuff like healthy drinks.”

“You would be motivated to come to class; you wouldn’t be like this is just another day.”

Access to healthy food helps participants make better choices about what they eat. Both students and parents find opportunities for real community leadership on issues that matter in their lives. Parents directly involved in the school garden share their knowledge with other parents, students and teachers, and they reinforce their children’s learning at home.

During the 2010-2011 school year, Urban Sprouts reached 809 students at six San Francisco schools in some of the most underserved of the city’s neighborhoods. The program enabled 10 families to grow food in their own garden plots. An additional 22 school family members participated in Urban Sprouts cooking classes and events.⁴³

During its 3-year LFNE project, Urban Sprouts often received inquiries about their approach. Staff members were frequently invited to present these ideas at conferences and workshops. They began developing the *Garden-based Education Model and Training Initiative* to share their model with other programs by providing training, technical assistance, and coaching to organizations interested in launching similar projects.



ENGAGING STUDENTS AND PARENTS IN FRESH APPROACHES TO FOOD

“Fresh Fest~Festival Fresco”
Collective Roots, East Palo Alto

“This class has been perfect for us! You have given us ideas of how to cook things we never imagined we would have been able to cook. For me, really, this class has totally opened up my eyes.”
—A mother who attended “Cooking Matters.”

⁴² Urban Sprouts, “Evaluation and Outcomes.” At http://www.urbansprouts.org/?page_id=101#evaluation

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The Urban Sprouts model is described in detail at: http://www.urbansprouts.org/?page_id=6.



East Palo Alto has long been a community in need. One of the most densely populated cities in the greater San Francisco Bay area, East Palo Alto is home to some of the area's poorest residents. More than 14 percent of incomes fall below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and nearly half (44.3 percent) earn less than 185 percent of the FPL.⁴⁵ More than 80 percent of East Palo Alto's population is black or Hispanic, and 70 percent speak a language other than English.⁴⁶

This is a population at great risk for obesity and diabetes, diet and lifestyle-related conditions that disproportionately affect African Americans, Latinos, and the poorest Californians.⁴⁷ How do we address these complex issues?

Collective Roots was formed in 2000 to address these challenges through programs for food system change—to improve access to fresh, affordable, local produce and provide garden-based learning for students and adults. Key partners and collaborators include the Ravenswood City School District, East Palo Alto Charter School, Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association, and Three Squares. Funding for Fresh Fest/Festival Fresco comes from the *Network*, Palo Alto Community Fund, Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund, Sequoia Healthcare District, and Tides Foundation.

In 2009, the *Network* funded “Fresh Fest/Festival Fresco,” designed to reach school children (K-8) with a science-based nutrition program that incorporates hands-on learning and physical activities in a 5-week series of classes. Fresh Fest includes a unique package of activities and travels to schools, after-school programs, and youth organizations. Highlights include:

- **On Your Mark, Get Set, Breakfast!:** Kids explore healthy breakfast options, including oatmeal, and run a race to reinforce the idea that a good breakfast helps students thrive.
- **Bicycle Blender:** Students power a blender that mixes nutritious fresh fruit smoothies that they enjoy while learning about the relationship between calories consumed and calories burned through physical activity.
- **Processed or Not:** Kids learn pizza can be healthy. After turning wheat berries into flour using a hand grinder, they make pizza topped with fresh vegetables. Students draw the parts of a seed and learn the differences in nutritional quality of unprocessed, minimally processed, and highly processed foods.
- **Interactive Cooking Demonstrations:** Using materials developed by the California Department of Public Health's “Harvest of the Month” program, students prepare healthy snacks including black bean tostados and Ethiopian lentils.

Students have fun with these lessons. They eat the healthy snack they prepared and take the recipes home to share with their families.

Children and youth act as “a unifying force in the community,” says Block, and when we shift our view of youth from problems to possibilities, an alternative future is viable.⁴⁸ They can serve as catalysts for greater parent involvement. To date, more than

⁴⁵ US Census Bureau. American Fact Finder. American Communities Survey, 3-year data. 2008-2010. Table C17002. Ratio of Income to Poverty. http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_3YR_C17002&prodType=table

⁴⁶ United States Census. “East Palo Alto,” State & County Quick Facts, 2010/2011. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/gdf/states/06/0620956.html>

⁴⁷ Diamant, et al, “Obesity and Diabetes,” p. 4.

⁴⁸ Block, Community, p. 165.

120 parents have participated in “Cooking Matters” classes offered through Collective Roots. In Cooking Matters, they learn about nutrition, food budgeting, meal planning, and how to prepare healthy, affordable, tasty meals. Parental interest remains strong in these classes, because most people want to lead active lives and live in more healthful ways. This knowledge empowers them to make positive changes in their own lives and for their children.

Billy and Maria, parents of two children in East Palo Alto schools, both graduated from Cooking Matters and were excited and energized about what they learned. Both are now loyal shoppers at the Palo Alto Community Farmers’ Market. Maria signed on as a volunteer to teach Cooking Matters at the school where she works. Billy, who has diabetes, made a presentation to the County Board of Supervisors about the positive changes his family has experienced since having access to fresh, organic vegetables.

As the “Fresh Fest/Cooking Matters Outcomes” table shows, a large majority of the parents reported they ate more vegetables (81 percent), more fruit (69 percent), and more whole grains after participating in the classes. And nearly all reported their cooking skills improved.

Fresh Fest/Cooking Matters: Outcomes⁴⁹

Behavior	Percent
Eat more vegetables	81%
Eat more fruit	69%
Eat more low-fat or fat-free dairy products	53%
Eat more whole grains	71%
Improved cooking skills	90%



The enthusiasm of volunteers, staff, partners, parents, and students has enabled Collective Roots to grow and nourish East Palo Alto residents by providing nutrition education and garden-based learning programs that inspire participants to make healthy changes in their lives. Working through its dynamic staff and volunteers, active board of directors, and diverse community partners, Collective Roots educates and engages youth and communities in food system change through sustainable programs that impact health, education, and the environment.

⁴⁹ Collective Roots, “Year-end Impact Evaluation Report,” 2011.

Chapter 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRODUCES STRONGER COMMUNITIES

When our attention shifts from fighting disease to creating better health, new possibilities begin to emerge. Imagine building a “community of care” by working with others to make needed changes, accepting ownership, taking action, committing to sustaining new behavior and to new ways of thinking and interacting.⁵⁰ Community engagement makes this possible.

FOOD AND HEALTH EDUCATION PROMOTE STABILITY FOR ONCE-HOMELESS FAMILIES

“Growing Youth Project”
Alameda Point Collaborative, Oakland

Homeless people in our cities face huge obstacles. Food insecurity, the threat of violence, and chronic diseases are rampant. Low income and lack of transportation—problems that can seem overwhelming—further complicate lives.

The Growing Youth Project got its start in a youth-led community food assessment sponsored by the California Endowment in 2006. The assessment focused on 5 key areas: Access & Affordability, Hunger & Nutrition, Local Agriculture, Policy, and Community Resources. The findings of that assessment set the stage for developing a wide range of food, health, and farming activities at Alameda Point Collaborative (APC).⁵¹

APC is a supportive housing community located on a decommissioned naval base. Nearly 500 formerly homeless, low-income people live in 200 units once home to navy families. Residents include survivors of domestic violence, adults and children with disabilities (including substance abuse, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS), and veterans and their families.⁵²

Growing Youth was designed to address the challenges these groups face. APC’s urban farm forms the core of this program, which provides meaningful part-time employment, nutrition education, and leadership opportunities for youth. Residents of all ages benefit from increased access to fresh food from the garden: fruits, vegetables, eggs and honey.

APC employs teens as Community Educators (CEs) and provides them with training in nutrition, public speaking, workshop planning and lesson development. CEs acquire computer and communication skills directly transferable to other settings. CEs research and develop their own lesson plans for an eight-week series of nutrition and cooking classes they lead for children and their families. During monthly Family Health Nights, CEs distribute health and nutrition information and engage in dialog with other APC residents.

Most CEs say that before Growing Youth they thought of healthy foods as “tasting bad” or “gross.” One teen initially described vegetables as “nasty,”

⁵⁰ Block, *Community*, p. 174.

⁵¹ Alameda Point Collaborative, “2006 Food Security Findings and Recommendations,” available at: http://www.apcollaborative.org/images/APC_GrowingYouth.pdf

⁵² Dawn Carraway, Kate Casale, Tommy Freeman, Jerrard Green, Jernard Harris, Chanelle Haskins, and Farrell Williams, *Community Food Assessment of the Alameda Point Collaborative: The Growing Youth Project*, October 2005-August 2006.

but that perception began to change as she learned new ways to prepare them. While changing tastes and habits takes time, these students learn an important lesson early on: unhealthy foods have a negative impact on their health. Most say they're working on changing their behavior.⁵³

Growing Youth empowers young people who were once homeless to become leaders. As they learn how to build healthier bodies, they help grow healthier families and a stronger community. Their excitement about healthy food inspires many children, parents, and guardians to make healthier choices about what they eat and how they live.

The Growing Youth Project is woven into the fabric of the APC community, which also founded Ploughshares Nursery, a nonprofit business venture. This environmentally sustainable three-acre retail nursery specializes in organically grown drought-tolerant and edible plants that are native to California. Ploughshares Nursery generates revenue to support APC housing, creates job training opportunities for residents and sells products that are safe for the environment.

PARTNERSHIP BRINGS HEALTHY FOOD AND NUTRITION FACTS TO HIGH-NEEDS POPULATION

"The Good Food Bag"
Sacramento Hunger Coalition/Community Services Planning Council, Sacramento

"Nutritious food can be simple."

"It was fun! I loved the camaraderie."

"I made the recipe and shared it with my neighbors."

These are some of the excited statements participants made about the food bank's "Fun with Cooking" program.⁵⁴ This program is serving a more diverse group than ever due to the changing face of poverty. Many who show up at the food bank are the working poor with children, whose paychecks don't stretch to provide groceries all month. More

seniors show up too, their fixed incomes failing to keep up with rising prices and cutbacks in community services.

Responding to the growing need, four Sacramento-area community organizations formed a partnership to provide nutrition education for people using the food bank and community clinic. River City Food Bank, Center for AIDs Research, Education and Services (CARES), the Sacramento Hunger Coalition, and the Community Services Planning Council work together, each responsible for specific activities.

The food bank director, Eileen Thomas, wrote the curriculum. She shops for ingredients and leads cooking demonstrations. Margie Erwin, nutrition program coordinator for CARES, facilitates nutrition discussions, offers tips, and answers questions on healthy eating. The community services administrator handles paperwork, from class flyers to attendance records and monthly evaluations. A college intern helps prepare and distribute food bags of ingredients that participants take home to cook on their own.

"The Good Food Bag" includes two types of cooking/nutrition classes:

- **"Fun with Cooking"** single-session cooking demonstrations and nutrition education classes showing how to prepare simple, healthy recipes using fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains. The presentations are fun, lively, and interactive to engage participants. Following the class, each participant receives the recipe and a bag of groceries to prepare the recipe at home.
- **"Nutrition and You,"** a six-session series of classes that focus on nutrition and physical activity. All participants who completed an evaluation of the series reported eating more fruits and vegetables afterward.

⁵³ Focus group results from youth who participated in Growing Youth, in Alameda Point Collaborative's Growing Youth Project, "Community Educators Focus Group Summary," October 2011.

⁵⁴ Sacramento Hunger Coalition, "The Good Food Bag: Project Retrospective," August 12, 2011.

Recipes used in The Good Food Bag demonstrations come from cookbooks created through a CDPH/ Network partnership and funded by the California United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) CalFresh Program. *Soulful Recipes, Healthy Latino Recipes and Everyday Healthy Meals* offer tasty, healthy meals people can prepare quickly and easily using fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy grains and foods available through the food bank. Organizations benefit from access to these healthy recipes, which are a hit with participants in nutrition-education classes.

Participants find the interactive Good Food Bag classes fun and energizing. That’s important for motivating lasting changes. After each class, they eat the healthy meal they just prepared. Together they discover how to fix healthier meals quickly and easily. They also learn to connect healthy eating as a social experience.

The need for and success of The Good Food Bag has led to changes in its sponsoring organizations. CARES has expanded its commitment to nutrition, while the River City Food Bank has a new site, creating new opportunities for programs. As part of the sustainability effort, the Sacramento Hunger Coalition designed an Edible Landscape at Kennedy Estates housing development in Sacramento. Residents and volunteers planted 80 fruit and vegetable trees and shrubs, and residents received training to maintain the edible landscape. As participants promote the project to newer residents, the project becomes self-sustaining.

The Good Food Bag, “Fun with Cooking” Program Outcomes⁵⁵

550	Total participants
87%	Reported increased fruit/vegetable consumption
44%	Reported preparing a demonstrated recipe
36%	Reported specific nutrition knowledge gained
35%	Reported specific food prep/safety knowledge gained

BUILDING PROMISING FUTURES BY PROMOTING HEALTHY CHOICES

“Nutritious Beginnings”
 Child Development Resources,
 Ventura County

Child Development Resources (CDR) provides a foundation to build promising futures for children. CDR collaborates with parents and the community to, as they put it, “deliver programs that enrich lives.”

From 2003 to 2009, diabetes rates nearly doubled—from 5.5 percent to 9.0 percent—for Ventura County’s Latino population.⁵⁶ Rising rates hit hardest among families with lower incomes. Reversing this trend is essential to build promising futures for children in this community.

CDR approached this issue directly, working with parents of preschool children in the Head Start program. In addition to operating early childhood education and child care programs at 27 Head Start centers and at 43 home childcare sites in Ventura County, CDR also offers a program that brings one-on-one education to families through in-home visits. These existing relationships offered a unique opportunity.

Teachers facilitated nutrition education through a 6-part series of weekly home visits. They employed materials from “Healthy Beginnings” and “Harvest of the Month.” The Healthy Beginnings curriculum focuses on healthy eating and age-appropriate physical activities for preschool children. California’s Harvest of the Month is designed to empower and motivate students to enjoy and eat more fruits and vegetables and engage in daily physical activities.

These materials were woven into content the visiting teachers already used. Messages learned in classrooms were reinforced in home visits. Parents and children learned together, discovering how to choose and prepare healthier recipes. The program

⁵⁵ Source: “The Good Food Bag, Project Retrospective Presentation,” August 12, 2011.

⁵⁶ California Health Interview Survey, CHIS 2003 and 2009. Adult Public Use File. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Ask CHIS <http://www.chis.ucla.edu/main/default.asp>.



was designed to engage all the senses and to be fun as well as educational. Families enjoyed the taste testing and physical activities included in the program.

As parents became more aware of how to make healthier choices, they acted as positive role models for their children. Some were surprised to find out how much influence they have on their children's choices; when they lead the way, their children are willing to try different foods. Parents want to do their best. They are eager for information, education, and training on healthier lifestyles. Many believe that if they are in better health, they'll be better parents. That knowledge often empowers parents to make changes in their own diet and activity levels.

This CDR program reached over 180 families with its health-wise message. Effectiveness was measured using a pre- and post-test of the *Fruit and Vegetable Checklist*. Families also completed a *Monthly Activity Time Sheet*. The results were positive.

Parents made significant increases in nearly every *Checklist* measure. Overall, combined fruit and vegetable consumption rose, and parents offered more fruit and vegetables to their children at home.⁵⁷ That solid progress supports the effectiveness of the CDR program. However, these data also revealed participants ate more fruits than vegetables. To increase vegetable consumption even more, future sessions may begin to highlight specific vegetables, one at a time.

The CDR is committed to making this program available after the term of the present funding is complete. The need for ongoing outreach and education on nutrition and physical activity is essential to CDR's mission of building bright futures for the county's children. With formation of Constructing Connections of Ventura County, CDR intends to optimize its collaborations with government leaders, developers, employers, banking institutions, private foundations, planners, the Chamber of Commerce and local private/nonprofit agencies.

⁵⁷ CDR Ventura. Year-end Impact Evaluation Report. FFY2011.

Chapter 5

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DRIVES SUSTAINABILITY: FROM IDEA TO ACTION

“Involving the community and collaborating with its members are cornerstones of efforts to improve public health.” –NIH, Principles of Community Engagement

New behaviors, programs, and policies cannot last without ongoing support and involvement. That’s one reason the LFNE Channel promotes community engagement as the path to sustainability, to ensure the continuation of community health or quality of life benefits over time.⁵⁸

Sustainability does not happen automatically. It results from mobilizing community assets and developing capacities and resources.⁵⁹

Community assets might include funding, training and education, nutrition tools and resources, sustainability coaching, exposure to new networks and expertise.

A recent survey and phone interviews with LFNE contractors reveals steps these organizations took to sustain their nutrition education or food security projects. Of the 15 agencies that responded, 14 took direct action to continue their projects:⁶⁰

- 12 wrote grant proposals.
- 11 partnered with other organizations.
- 9 allocated internal funds.

As the Ecology Center reported, “We were fortunate to receive initial funding from LFNE that got the program started. This model went on to inform the development of People’s Grocery, Kaiser Farmers’ Markets, East Bay Asian Youth Centers’ nutrition-education program, and others.”⁶¹

When asked what parts of their original project were sustained, only two organizations continued the original program: The Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County and Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles. Sometimes program changes are necessary to accommodate other changes in the organization or in the community.

- Five agencies offered reduced versions of the project. For example, Urban Sprouts continues its original program on a smaller scale. Lower funding led to a decision to reduce the number of partner schools, which means fewer students participate.⁶²
- Six agencies offer modified versions of the project. An after-school nutrition program developed by Nextcourse evolved into “Culinary Leadership,” a high-school elective seen as a model for student leadership training in nutrition education.⁶³

⁵⁸ Center for Civic Partnerships. “Sustainability Toolkit: 10 Steps to Maintaining Your Community Improvements,” Public Health Institute, 2011, available at <http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/publications/Sustainability%20Toolkit%20Excerpt%20-%20Step%203.pdf>

⁵⁹ Principle 7 of community engagement, presented in NIH, *Principles*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., LFNE, 2011 Sustainability Study,” pp. 34-36.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 35.

- Six agencies trained others to implement their approach, among them the Community Services Planning Council/Sacramento Hunger Commissions, which trained residents of the Kennedy Estate housing project to maintain an Edible Garden located on the estate. Residents who receive training then pass along the program to new community residents, creating a self-sustaining model.⁶⁴

These LFNE contractors clearly saw the value of their nutrition education efforts. They determined the path to sustainability that made the most sense for them, and found ways to continue.

While fundraising was a common path to sustainability, coalition-building was also important.

- Nextcourse received sustainability training through the Center for Civic Partnership, which opened the door to additional help with strategic planning.⁶⁵
- The Sacramento Hunger Coalition collaborates with a local immigrant support center to initiate an emergency food provider’s forum. Its collaboration with the Center for AIDs Research, Education, and Services (CARES) makes it possible to continue Fun with Cooking and nutrition education classes for another year.⁶⁶

These LFNE contractors benefited both directly and indirectly from their collaborations and partnerships with other community-based organizations.

The *Network*, through the LFNE Channel, builds stronger communities that are more resilient and sustainable. LFNE projects have made a positive impact in neighborhoods and communities across California. They demonstrate the potential for diverse organizations and people to work together, learn from one another, and build capacity to ensure the sustainability of successful efforts.



Engaging individuals and families through community organizations empowers people to change their behavior, take steps that improve their health, connect with others at a deeper level and contribute to reweaving the social fabric. As people engage, they learn more about the issues and become more aware of their choices. They become accountable for their decisions and committed to positive change.

Community engagement is the path to health promotion and to a deeper connection between people, organizations, and communities, which sets the stage for healthier choices throughout life.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 46

⁶⁶ Ibid.

A Call to Action



Each of us is part of many communities. Some of them need our help right now. The LFNE Channel's approach to working with community-based organizations offers excellent models for moving forward to improve health behaviors, food access, and participation in physical activity. Now is the time.

- Get involved. Community engagement works to promote healthier choices.
- Engage people from the community from the beginning. Look for ways to pass on skills. Building capacity in individuals and in organizations strengthens communities too.
- Commit to the long haul. Promoting healthy eating practices and physical activity are long-term investments.⁶⁷
- It will be worth it. Without taking these steps, obesity and chronic diseases will continue to fuel the healthcare crisis upon us.

The community engagement approach to nutrition education and obesity prevention has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities throughout California.

⁶⁷ Center for Civic Partnerships, "Fresh ideas for community nutrition and physical activity," Public Health Institute, Sacramento, California, 2002.

Resources

Community Engagement in Design and Planning, Prevention Institute, November 2011.

Demonstrates that community engagement is an effective mechanism for creating lasting health improvements by galvanizing resident participation to create healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities.

preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-316/127.html

Engaging Communities in Changing Nutrition and Physical Activity Environments, November 2009.

A brief that discusses how HEAC and CCROPP are engaging communities. Presents promising practices for community engagement demonstrated by grantee achievements.

www.partnershipph.org/sites/default/files/HEAC_CCROPP_EngagingCommunities.Updated5.pdf

Principles of Community Engagement, Second Edition, National Institutes of Public Health, July 2011.

Principles provides public health professionals, healthcare providers, researchers, and community-based leaders and organizations with both a

science base and a practical guide for engaging partners—individuals, groups, organizations, and agencies—in projects that affect them. The principles of engagement can be used by people in a range of roles, from the program funder who needs to know how to support community engagement to the researcher or community leader who needs hands-on, practical information about how to mobilize the members of a community to partner in research initiatives. This primer also provides tools for those who are leading efforts to improve population health through community engagement and profiles of successful projects.

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/

Roadmap to Improving Food and Physical Activity Environments: Tips and Tools for Community Change, Second Edition Partnership for the Public's Health, 2011.

A guide to examples, tips and lessons from the Healthy Eating, Active Communities (HEAC) program. It also includes success stories from HEAC, the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP), and from other California communities.

www.californiaconvergence.org

To learn more about the *Network for a Healthy California* and to find additional resources, visit: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CPNS/Pages/default.aspx

“ **Fruits and vegetables embody characteristics of a healthy community: connectedness, nourishing a strong safe core, and seeds of possibility.** ”

–Vicki Sanderford-O’Connor

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