

Advancing Community Prevention through the Champions for Change Peer-to-Peer Projects

*Expanding nutrition education and policy, systems, and environmental
change strategies to advance health in Los Angeles County*



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Introduction

In 2013, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) selected five local organizations to implement evidence-based Peer-to-Peer (P2P) projects in low-income communities. Funding for the effort was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) program. In California, this program is known as *Champions for Change* and is administered by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) as Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) grants to local health departments. The selected P2P organizations in Los Angeles vary widely in organizational structure and scope, and include farmers' market operators, school districts, social justice and empowerment organizations, affordable housing developers, and wellness programs. The result is an array of programs with various implementation strategies and organizational capacities. To better understand these factors, LACDPH requested a series of qualitative assessments to examine the nuances in implementing the P2P projects. The goal is to better understand the facilitators and barriers to success, determine any corresponding recommendations for improvement, and to inform future program planning and services delivery.

The Need for Multi-Level Community Prevention Strategies

Obesity rates nationwide have doubled for adults and tripled for children over the past 30 years¹. In Los Angeles County alone, adult obesity prevalence rose from 20.1% in 2001 to nearly 25% in 2011 and adolescent obesity prevalence increased from 30.5% to 35.3%² during the same time period. At the neighborhood level, Los Angeles County mirrors the nation with a direct correlation between high economic hardship and high obesity rates. This disproportionate burden of obesity and other chronic diseases in low-income communities can be attributed to a composite of various factors ranging from lack of healthy food access and limited safe outdoor spaces, to underlying social and economic conditions that affect health. Multi-level approaches that target policies and the environment, combined with education to increase knowledge and awareness of healthy behavior, can provide meaningful solutions to root causes of food insecurity, less than ideal social conditions, and poor health.

“As with tobacco control, obesity prevention will require major policy and contextual changes. Comprehensive approaches involving multiple strategies and sectors and all relevant stakeholder groups will likely be needed to reverse the epidemic.”



Frieden, T.R., Dietz, W., Collins, J., 2010. Reducing childhood obesity through policy change: acting now to prevent obesity. Health Aff. 29, 357–363.

¹ Reference – Levi J, Vinter S, Richardson L, Laurent R, Segal LM. *F as in Fat: How obesity policies are failing in American*. Washington, DC: Trust for America's Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009. Note – language modified from LACDPH Obesity Report 2011

² Wolstein J, Babey SH, Diamant AL. *Obesity in California*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2015.

SNAP-Ed's expanded focus from individual-level behavioral change to more comprehensive approaches marks an important transformation in programming. These federal investments require implementing agencies to create the conditions in low-income communities that encourage and promote healthy choices, so that people can readily act on the nutrition education they receive. Further, this shift in program strategy has created unprecedented opportunity to evaluate both the reach and impact of interventions that attempt to improve health outcomes in low-income communities through a combination of nutrition education and policy, systems, and environmental change strategies (PSEs).

The P2P Model

The goal of the P2P model is to allow trained educators, who share common characteristics with the communities they serve, to be catalysts for change through education and empowerment. P2P has been employed in a variety of health education contexts and evidence demonstrates efficacy in increasing participant knowledge and awareness on content delivered. Through this approach, health educators are viewed as equals, building participant trust and eliminating many of the barriers to behavior change. In addition, P2P, which has traditionally been used purely for education delivery, has expanded into a more comprehensive approach to building community capacity to address policy and environmental change.

Using the P2P model, the five selected Champions for Change funded partners have worked collaboratively with communities to deliver nutrition education and to implement policy, systems and environmental change (PSE) projects that aim to reduce high rates of obesity in low-income neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County. Under this funding stream, peer educators hired directly from each community participated in continuous learning as they delivered nutrition education classes and collaborated with peers to improve environments and systems that dictate health outcomes.

Agency Descriptions

Representing diverse sectors, each selected agency has a unique set of competencies and expertise in program implementation. Through Champions for Change P2P Projects in Los Angeles, all agencies deliver nutrition education, advance selected PSE strategies and empower local residents to drive change.



Lead Organizations



Esperanza Community Housing Corporation (Esperanza)

Esperanza Community Housing Corporation is an affordable housing and economic redevelopment agency focused on improving opportunity for residents of South Los Angeles and the Figueroa Corridor.

- Affordable housing site gardens
 - Healthy restaurant menus
-



Lawndale Elementary School District (LESD)

Lawndale Elementary School District's eight schools deliver education to students from preschool through eighth grade while supporting parents and families.

- Edible gardens at school sites
 - Market makeovers
 - Produce distribution channels – school garden to cafeteria and garden to foodbank
-



Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)

Social Justice Learning Institute is dedicated to improving health, educational and social outcomes for communities of color through empowerment and mobilization.

- Farmers' market with fresh produce purchasing incentives
 - School site edible gardens
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St. Francis Medical Center (St. Francis)

St. Francis Medical Center, an anchor institution in Lynwood provides integrated health care services to Southeast Los Angeles communities.

- Safe and Healthy Parks resolution
 - Edible gardens
 - Church site healthy food and beverage policy
-



Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA)

Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles is a local non-profit that manages farmers' markets across the county and aims to build sustainable food systems that serve low-income residents.

- Farmers' markets with fresh produce purchasing incentives
- Market makeover

Methods

In 2015, LACDPH funded Prevention Institute and Community Intelligence (the project team) to conduct a diagnostic program planning and quality improvement process. Data were collected through multiple methods including a scholarly literature review, relevant programmatic document review, key informant interviews, participation in project coordinator meetings, site visits, and administration of an online survey of program-level stakeholders.

Literature Review and Relevant Document Review:

Scholarly and grey literature as well as relevant programmatic documents (e.g. USDA guidance on program implementation and evaluation, project work plans) were identified and reviewed. The literature review included 18 articles, including qualitative meta-analyses that provided a framework and context for identifying evidence-based best practices and areas for further study. The evidence base was used to guide review of Champions for Change P2P Projects, including development of the interview and survey instruments.

Key Informant Interviews:

Trained interviewers conducted semi-structured interviews with the lead program manager or coordinator at each of the five funded organizations. Key informants provided information about their experiences with the P2P projects and described challenges, successes, lessons learned, and opportunities. Interviews were administered over the phone by two trained interviewers and generally took 60-90 minutes to complete. Interviews were transcribed, analyzed for themes, and provided the basis for the case stories.

Facilitated Group Discussion Observation at Project Coordinator Meetings:

The project team was invited to participate in two project coordinator meetings facilitated by LACDPH. The meetings provided an opportunity to observe group-level sharing regarding practice-based opportunities and challenges.

Site Visits:

The project team conducted five site visits to gain deeper understanding of each funded organization's program through direct observation of program elements, such as P2P classes, community gardens, farmers' markets, and the neighborhood market.

Organizational Capacity Survey:

To augment interview and site visit findings, the project team distributed an online survey to program administrators and managers via Survey Monkey. The survey instrument asked participants their perspectives on aspects pertinent to project implementation, including their own perceptions of organizational resources needed to effectively implement the projects. The twelve respondents represent at least two respondents from each organization. The purpose of the survey was to understand program administrator perspectives on infrastructure, resources and capacity for effective implementation of their P2P projects to inform future implementation efforts.



Findings and Recommendations

The following findings and recommendations are based on data collected through the described methods and highlight selected issues relevant to stakeholders interested in implementing obesity prevention efforts using the P2P model. This effort focused on the five local organizations working in diverse and urban settings under the purview of a major metropolitan health department, and as such, offers a novel contribution to the growing evidence-base in this arena.

FINDING 1: Project Coordinator meetings created an open forum for peer-level problem solving.

During the project period LACDPH convened quarterly meetings for project coordinators and staff of the five agencies, who reported that the meeting provided critical support to their programmatic work. During the meetings, successes, challenges, and lessons-learned, were shared among project staff. LACDPH staff employed a variety of techniques to build trust and collegiality at each convening. For example, when local funded agencies identified challenges, group-level brainstorming and dialogue supported identification of creative solutions. Other techniques included facilitation of sharing forums and non-judgmental listening, demonstrated by acknowledgement as well as cues to other agencies to share their experiences. These meetings serve as a useful venue for peer-learning and knowledge transfer across programs, topic, or strategy. For instance, LACDPH staff made a point to identify organizational resources and expertise beyond the county that could assist implementing agencies in advancing their objectives. LACDPH staff also conducted follow-up on action items from previous meetings, demonstrating accountability.

RECOMMENDATION: Inventory unique skills, talents and assets of each organization and use this as the basis for creating opportunities for peer-learning and skills development.

Each of the five agencies funded to conduct P2P demonstrated unique capacities and skillsets; they also represented different “types” of organizations—community-based, hospital-based, school-based, etc. As a result, each had knowledge and insight applicable to other sites, whether that involved participant outreach, partnership development, or policy change. Because the coordinator meetings were already providing a peer-learning opportunity, one potential way to further utilize the cross-site meetings is for peer-based learning and technical assistance on topics representing areas of expertise of the funded organizations, and of interest to local organizations. For instance, if one or two funded partners clearly excel in enrollment and retention of male participants or working with the Faith-Based Community, what strategies and approaches are they using? How could their experiences be translated and shared with other grantees?

RECOMMENDATION: Build on the “safe space” and consider whether it is also possible to utilize cohort meetings to accomplish grant requirements, like administrative duties.

LACDPH played an important convening role which appeared to contribute to cross-site communication, group-level accountability and ongoing learning. This practice should be maintained. During interviews and in one of the group sessions, issues of program reporting and documentation were discussed. One recommendation for further exploration is to determine whether some of the administrative and reporting duties could appropriately be accomplished during a small portion of the coordinators’ meeting with the aim of streamlining and accomplishing some of the administrative tasks.



FINDING 2: The locally funded organizations had demonstrated track-records improving food and physical activity environments; this appeared to have a positive influence on project implementation at each site, and enriched group learning.

The five local Champions for Change-funded agencies each had proven capacity in content areas related to their selected PSE and nutrition education projects at the time of funding. Each agency also had a unique role in their respective communities – providing farmers’ markets, affordable housing, education, community empowerment, and health care services. These varied experiences and competencies served as the foundation for effective project implementation (e.g., they all had “high readiness”). The differences within the cohort also seemed to add value to the capacity for success as a cohort. For instance, a school district and a community based organization shared tips and learned from each other about navigating community-school partnerships to advance PSE efforts and used their differing perspectives, resources, and experiences to improve their work. This may not have been possible if all five funded organizations represented similar skill sets and organizational types.

RECOMMENDATION: Learn as much as possible about the skills, capacities and experiences of each funded organization, document them, and define areas of growth for each organization.

Established organizations have many assets to ensure delivery of high-quality project implementation, including a track record of success in their specific geographic focus areas or specific strategic niche. However, challenges may still arise including: difficulty coordinating with other organizations, occasional “turf” issues regarding PSE site locations, or a lack of participation by the target audience. One solution is technical assistance and training designed to strengthen organizational capacity around the specific interventions. Also, when thinking about future cohorts, LACDPH might consider whether the more experienced organizations can serve as mentor sites.

FINDING 3: Program staff generally felt effective in their roles, and supported by adequate training; however, the roles of peer educators in making policy, systems and environmental changes are interpreted differently across local organizations.

Peer educators and their program supervisors generally agreed that an effective training infrastructure and clear program guidelines helped them to be effective and meet the needs of their target communities. In particular, peer educators at each agency felt well-equipped with information and resources around healthy eating. In general, peer educators felt slightly less knowledgeable about physical activity. Agency staff at multiple organizational levels – peer educators, program coordinators, and leadership – all felt confident in their agency’s ability to recruit, train, and retain effective peer educators. Similarly, they referenced the various resources and trainings provided or facilitated by LACDPH to support nutrition education activities. However, there was not a consistently clear expectation about the role of peer educators in conducting, contributing, or leading policy, systems and environmental change work.

RECOMMENDATION: Clarify roles and build capacity of peer educators around the knowledge and skills required for policy, systems, and environmental change work.

P2P education and advancing policy, systems and environmental change require two distinct but overlapping skillsets. Identifying core skills and content needed to increase the likelihood that policy, systems, and environmental work is successful is critical. Competencies LACDPH could consider building among peer educators to generate skills in leading and supporting effective PSE implementation may include: advocacy for policy; community leadership; public speaking; and community organizing. In order to merge peer education with PSE change, LACDPH should clarify expectations of the relationship between being a peer educator and coordinating policy, systems, and environmental efforts. Additional training on policy, systems, and environmental change efforts could increase both staff and peer educator comfort and efficacy in implementing the selected strategies.





CONCLUSION

While the benefits of P2P projects and policy, systems and environmental changes are well-documented, the nuances in successful implementation of these strategies in low-income communities of color, namely, with African American and Latino populations, are less documented. The program planning diagnostic and quality improvement process undertaken in Los Angeles County brings to light important facets of local efforts by skilled organizations working in urban communities. This report is intended to highlight some of the innovative and effective strategies used by local organizations and the supporting local health department. It also highlights potential areas for further work that specifically emerged within the complex and diverse context that is Los Angeles County. These findings build upon prior knowledge regarding implementation of SNAP-Ed activities, and can help to inform successful program delivery both locally and across the United States. This addition to the field is particularly timely as the SNAP-Ed program adapts to recent changes in guidelines that allow for expansion into multi-level interventions designed to change policies, systems and environments that shape access to, and affordability of, healthy foods and physical activity opportunities.

Organizational Spotlights:

Champions for Change Projects



Esperanza Community Housing



Mural at Mercado La Paloma¹

Pioneering Healthier Food Environments through Edible Gardens in South Los Angeles

Like many parts of Los Angeles, the Figueroa Corridor is home to a vibrant mix of cultures, made evident by local businesses and stories told through public art. But in the community surrounding Mercado La Paloma, one of South Los Angeles' economic redevelopment hubs, the concentration of fast-food eateries remains high. Only 20% of individuals in South Los Angeles report finding fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood, and rates of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and related chronic conditions also continue to be a problem.²

Despite these challenges, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation (Esperanza), a non-profit housing developer that established Mercado la Paloma, is working to improve health outcomes. Esperanza was established in 1989, with the goal of revitalizing deteriorating apartments at a time when residents' homes were being threatened by rapid growth and development pressures. Through relationships with community members, grassroots organizations, local businesses, and policymakers, Esperanza prioritizes the health and well-being of residents. Focus areas include local economic development, healthy food access, and nutrition education to local families.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Established edible gardens on-site at affordable housing residences, Villa Esperanza and Maple Mae Apartments, along the Figueroa Corridor in South Los Angeles
- Developed a community garden at Richardson Family Park to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables and build resident engagement through garden-based learning
- Partnered with the Choose Health LA Restaurants program to initiate and promote healthier menus at Mercado La Paloma, Esperanza's vibrant marketplace in South Los Angeles

¹ Photo credit for the Mural at Mercado La Paloma: <http://www.a-european-in-la.eu/2012/06/hidden-gems-and-overrated-stars/>

² UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. California Health Interview Survey: CHIS 2012. Los Angeles, CA.

Homegrown strategies to develop edible gardens with families and residents

In spring of 2014, Esperanza held a series of meetings with residents that allowed tenants to share health concerns that were affecting their families, and to assess potential solutions. The group determined that healthy food access to full-service grocery stores was an issue, and that edible gardens near their homes could provide a solution. Esperanza recruited peer educators from the community as part of their preexisting Community Health Promoters Training Program. This program works to identify and train promotoras, who are identified community leaders that become peer educators and champions for community engagement around health and wellness. In addition to providing nutrition education, these peer educators also worked with their communities to develop a plan for implementing and supporting the edible gardens. “Peer educators meet regularly to discuss what worked during nutrition classes,” says Champions for Change Project Coordinator, Bernice Quinones. “They are so determined. Our peer educators give each other feedback on a consistent basis to further improve how nutrition information is communicated to participants.”



Champions for Change nutrition education class at Richardson Park. Photo courtesy of Esperanza Community Housing.



Yoga at 11th Avenue Park as part of Champions for Change nutrition education classes. Photo courtesy of Esperanza Community Housing.

“ Once community members realize they have the power to grow their own food, they begin involving their families in community gardens. This has inspired residents to start gardens on their own and cook healthier meals using fresh ingredients.”

– Viurdi Araniva, Champions for Change Project Coordinator



Champions for Change nutrition education class promotion table at Mercado La Paloma. Photo courtesy of Esperanza Community Housing.

Cultivating community champions to source local fresh fruits and vegetables from the neighborhood

To form the foundation for local ownership and sustainability of the proposed edible gardens, Esperanza worked with the promotoras and community members to develop garden resident stewardship committees at each housing site. For example, residents at Villa Esperanza and Maple Mae Apartments stay actively involved in maintaining the gardens, and a number of community partners come together to maintain the community garden at Richardson Family Park. A colorful mural provides the backdrop for the overflowing garden beds, where an assortment of seasonal fruits, vegetables, and herbs are grown and harvested year-round.

Esperanza's work at Richardson Family Park also helped pave the way for another local health collaborative to benefit from the garden beds. Best Start Metro LA – a parent leadership group funded by First 5 LA – now plants and harvests there, and continues to engage parents from the neighborhood. The popularity of the gardens may point to a larger unmet need among families who want to grow their own food. Esperanza has also worked with other community partners, like the food bank, libraries, churches, and city departments, to provide additional resources.



Esperanza's combination of nutrition education, partnerships, and other complementary strategies such as healthy retail provide robust support for selected environmental strategies. Viurdi Araniva, a peer educator recruited from Esperanza's Community Health Promoters Training Program in 2013, described: "After working in the garden and teaching nutrition education classes, I learned that many community members and promotoras have started herb gardens in their own homes too. Once community members realize they have the power to grow their own food, they begin involving their families in community gardens. This has inspired residents to start gardens on their own and cook healthier meals using fresh ingredients." Ms. Araniva continues to visit the garden at Richardson Family Park often, helping community members harvest the fruits and vegetables they have planted.

Collaborating with local restaurants to create healthier menu choices

Through the Champions for Change project in Los Angeles, Esperanza also owns and operates Mercado La Paloma, a vibrant marketplace and cultural hub in the Figueroa Corridor. To encourage and support healthy eating at Mercado, Esperanza worked with local vendors on menu-labeling efforts to help customers make informed meal choices. Building on this, Esperanza plans to partner with the Choose Health LA Restaurants program (another program of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health) to engage Mercado vendors in developing and promoting healthier menus. Participating restaurants will offer smaller portion sizes, provide children’s meals that include fruits and vegetables, and increase availability of healthier beverage options, including chilled water at no cost to patrons. While the program is yet to be implemented, “Most of our food vendors are excited to participate,” says Bernice, “and when vendors at Mercado La Paloma promote healthier menus, participants in our nutrition classes get to apply their knowledge to discern menu labels and eat smaller portions.” Esperanza is also exploring opportunities to implement a community garden on-site at the Mercado to more closely connect nutrition education with the healthy menu options for participants.

“ When vendors at Mercado La Paloma promote healthier menus, participants in our nutrition classes get to apply their knowledge to discern menu labels and eat smaller portions.”

– Bernice Quinones, Champions for Change Project Coordinator

Building a Foundation to Foster Future Growth

Esperanza is looking to build on prior efforts to train community health promoters, increase nutrition awareness among low-income residents, and build new garden beds so that more residents can continue to grow their own food. Through these efforts, Esperanza is building a promising model for achieving a healthier food environment in South Los Angeles. Looking ahead, Esperanza plans to work with community partners, city agencies, and residents to ensure that gardens are managed collectively and that community members are able to enjoy both nutrition education and increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables.



Fresh produce sprouting at the Villa Esperanza garden. Photo courtesy of Esperanza Community Housing.



Lawndale Elementary School District (LESD)



Champions for Change nutrition education class participants engaging in stretching activity at Lawndale Community Center. Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.

Working to Transform Neighborhood Food Environments

In Lawndale, a vibrant city in Los Angeles County, corner stores selling snacks high in salt and sugar are common, and access to healthy foods and beverages can be limited. Evidence shows that residents living in neighborhoods with limited supermarkets, abundant convenience stores and poor access to safe greenspaces are at the highest risk for chronic disease.¹ In Lawndale, residents are inundated with retailers that offer unhealthy foods and the city has under one acre of park land per 1,000 residents, less than one third of the county average.² However, corner stores can be part of the solution by offering more nutritious foods and beverages that are essential to good health.

¹ Morland, K., Diex Roux, A., and Wing, S. "Supermarkets, Other Food Stores, and Obesity: The Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30, no.4 (2006): 333-339.

² Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. *Parks and Public Health in Los Angeles County: A Cities and Communities Report*; May 2016.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Developed the Healthy Retail initiative in collaboration with La Fiesta Market, a local corner store committed to selling healthy, affordable foods
- Won recognition for La Fiesta Market, recipient of the California Champions for Change Excellence Award
- Distributed over 1,250 pounds of produce from school gardens to local emergency food outlet



To address community health needs, Lawndale Elementary School District (LESD) has a robust Wellness Program that is helping students, parents and caregivers eat healthy and engage in physical activity. Within this program, LESD implemented evidence-based Champions for Change P2P Projects, where residents from the community serve as trained Peer Educators to teach local nutrition education classes, and support policy, systems, and environmental change strategies.

Growing a network of peer educators to generate momentum for healthy foods

In implementing their P2P projects, LESD is working to bridge school-based nutrition education and changes in the school and community food environments to make it easier for students and families to access healthy foods. To achieve this goal, LESD brought together a wide network of community partners including: Choose Health LA Kids, Head Start, local public libraries, food banks and community centers. From this, LESD discovered an opportunity for teachers and faculty to launch a school-based garden initiative to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to students in the classroom. LESD and community partners also wanted to improve healthy food access in surrounding corner stores.

In 2014, LESD met with the school wellness council, parents, teachers, and faculty to develop a healthy retail program. Working with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, LESD reached out to La Fiesta Market and other local stores to participate in promotion and availability of healthy foods. By harnessing the power of community residents serving as peer educators, the group developed ties between residents and corner store owners. Peer educators hired directly from the school community proved to be essential connectors. “We make an effort to make sure peer educators feel supported,” states Camille Thorson, Project Coordinator with LESD. “We go above and beyond to provide ample training. We have full-time staff that train and provide additional support consistently to our peer educator team.”

Making the case for a healthy Lawndale

After recruiting and training peer educators, the next step in developing a healthy retail program was to better understand community conditions. To do this, peer educators and key stakeholders identified multiple corner stores that directly impacted Lawndale’s food environment. La Fiesta Market, for

WHAT IS THE HEALTHY RETAIL PROGRAM?

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Champions for Change Retail Program partners with local corner stores across Los Angeles to conduct healthy market “makeovers,” including:

- New marketing materials that promote healthier options and prominently display nutritious options, such as fresh produce, canned fruits and vegetables, and water.
- Colorful murals decorating the outside of the store to show neighbors that these markets are committed to the health of their customers and community.
- Store tours and healthy food demonstrations to support NEOP nutrition classes and engage customers.





Mural along the perimeter of La Fiesta Market. Photo courtesy of FAME Corporations.

“ We go above and beyond to provide ample training. We have full-time staff that train and provide additional support consistently to our peer educator team.”

*– Camille Thorson,
Project Coordinator with LESD*

example, was within one mile of eight Lawndale schools, and store owners Martin and Maria Ramirez expressed immediate interest in making healthier options more readily available. LESD began working with La Fiesta to reconfigure sections of the store to make healthier choices more obvious and appealing.

This work had a ripple effect. After initiating the retail programming, an LESD student leadership group called Realizing Amazing Potential (RAP) began volunteering with the store to ensure that water and fruit were available for customers.

They replenished marketing materials and cleaned shelves to maintain store improvements. Middle school students created posters to highlight MyPlate and promote the healthy foods sold at La Fiesta. In November 2014, a deteriorating billboard was replaced with a vibrant mural that was painted by Lawndale community members and a Los Angeles based artist to promote healthy living at La Fiesta Market.

La Fiesta Market has since been recognized as an example of success in improving healthy food access in Lawndale. As participants learn about healthy foods during nutrition education classes, they know they can walk into La Fiesta to find many of these healthy options on display. Refrigerators once stocked with sugar-sweetened beverages now offer bottled water situated at eye level. “More community members are coming in for fruit and healthy foods daily,” says Marco Ramirez, the owners’ son. “When customers come in and ask for recipe cards, it’s clear they are taking an active interest in healthier options. We can see that the heavier push toward healthy advertising has proven successful.”

La Fiesta Market continues to explore new strategies to support a healthier food environment in Lawndale, such as ensuring that suppliers and distributors who stock their shelves also support by having healthy products available. La Fiesta’s experience highlights the important role that suppliers have in supporting local store owners interested in stocking healthy products.



Fostering healthy food systems from within

LESD has expanded and improved nine school gardens within the district and two satellite Head Start gardens. This included defining new produce distribution channels and championing garden-based education to diverse stakeholders including students, parents and community members. As a result of targeted nutrition education, 50% of participants across 33 parent classes reported starting home gardens to supplement their family's fruit and vegetable intake. RAP Program students are also actively involved in school garden maintenance and staff garden trainings.

LESD has also expanded the reach of its school gardens to Lawndale's most vulnerable populations. Six school gardens now have beds designated for produce donation to Lawndale's Free Food Commodities Program, the city's emergency food distribution program. To date, over 1,250 pounds of produce cultivated and harvested by LESD students and families have been donated by the school gardens to the commodities program.

School gardens are also encouraging local produce procurement districtwide. As a result of LESD's work, the district has committed to purchasing California grown produce to support the Harvest of the Month Program, and continue to purchase local produce for cafeteria lunches.

Cultivating community champions through peer-based learning

Adjacent to one of LESD's elementary schools is the Lawndale Community Center, where nutrition education classes are offered. Each week, class participants try out healthy recipes, many with ingredients purchased at La Fiesta. Peer educators also use class time to connect with participants, share personal stories, and reinforce key messages from the nutrition lesson. These classes aren't just about providing information—they also empower people to change their behaviors and improve their health.

Ron Edwards, known in the community as "Old Skool," has experienced a personal transformation after being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and then participating in the nutrition education classes: "I said to my doctor, 'it seems like I've been taking medication all my life. What can I do about it?'" recalled Edwards. "My doctor said I needed to change what I eat." Edwards started attending nutrition education classes at Smith Elementary and used this opportunity



NEOP nutrition education class. Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.





“ I said to my doctor, ‘it seems like I’ve been taking medication all my life. What can I do about it? My doctor said I needed to change what I eat.’”

– Ron Edwards, known in the community as “Old Skool”



NEOP nutrition class graduate, Ron Edwards (aka “old Skool”). Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.

to make major changes to his diet. After five months, Edward’s health had improved dramatically to the point that he no longer needed medication. “I did the math and realized that over the course of my life, I have paid over \$22,000 on prescriptions,” said Edwards. “If I had made these changes to my health 45 years earlier, I would have been \$22,000 richer.”

LESD’s Champions for Change projects have inspired students, parents, caregivers and community members like Ron Edwards, to make changes that improve health. The combination of nutrition education, school gardens and the store improvements is making a difference, for community members and local businesses alike. “When I see participants in the grocery store, they tell me how much the project has changed their life,” remarked Champions for Change peer educator, Terrance Guillory. “The class has made them feel comfortable to talk about their challenges accessing healthy foods in their community.”





NEOP nutrition class participants at Lawndale Community Center. Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.

Building a Foundation to Foster Future Growth

Looking ahead, LESD plans to continue building healthy food environments within and beyond the school walls. LESD recently approved a volunteer policy and will continue recruiting parents and community members to support garden maintenance, coordinate gardening days, and ensure community presence at schools with ongoing guidance from peer educators. As edible gardens continue to flourish across Lawndale, LESD plans to expand efforts through a garden-to-cafeteria project pilot.

LESD's P2P projects represent a promising model that bridges education and the local food environment, with schools, small businesses, and community members all working together to make the goal of healthy eating a reality for Lawndale residents. Building on the leadership of La Fiesta and the peer educators, the City of Lawndale has a strong foundation for continued health improvement for years to come.

“ When I see participants in the grocery store, they tell me how much the NEOP-LA Project has changed their life. The class has made them feel comfortable to talk about their challenges accessing healthy foods in their community.”

– Terrance Guillory, Champions for Change peer educator

Funded in part by USDA SNAP-Ed, an equal opportunity provider and employer. The contents of the report are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the agencies mentioned. The LA Team includes Los Angeles County Department of Public Health staff from the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention's Special Projects unit which coordinates the local NEOP evaluation, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program, and the Office of the Deputy Director.



Social Justice Learning Institute



Inglewood Farmers' Market. Photo by Erin Aubry Kaplan, reprinted at www.kcet.org

Transforming the Food Environment in Inglewood and Lennox

In Inglewood and neighboring Lennox, good health has become a challenge for many families, partly due to limited access to nutritious foods and safe environments. In both cities, the saturation of fast food restaurants is high and residents suffer from higher than average rates of diet related chronic diseases when compared to Los Angeles County.^{1,2} In Inglewood, the childhood obesity rate hovers far above the county average at about 27%.²

Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI), a community organization dedicated to improving health, educational, and social outcomes for communities of color, is addressing these issues. With support from the Champions for Change P2P Projects, SJLI is empowering residents and mobilizing community members, the public health sector, schools, and local government to improve healthy food environments through various projects

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Established the *first* ever farmers' market in Inglewood, with strong nutrition guidelines prohibiting vendors from selling unhealthy foods and beverages
- Developed five school gardens in Lennox by building a supportive network of parents, teachers, school faculty and peer educators
- Launched two community gardens in Queens Park and at Social Justice Learning Institute

¹ Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. *Parks and Public Health in Los Angeles County: A Cities and Communities Report*; May 2016.

² Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology. *Obesity and Related Mortality in Los Angeles County: A Cities and Communities Health Report*; September 2011.

in these target areas. For example, SJLI has worked to develop seven community gardens, and has launched the first ever farmers' market in Inglewood. This work is an affirmation of SJLI's long-standing involvement with the community, and its commitment to advancing health and equity.

Growing community capacity to advocate for fresh and affordable foods

In 2014, SJLI partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to conduct community assessments in two Lennox neighborhoods. The results were used to develop SJLI's P2P implementation plan and showed many community residents had a strong interest in building community gardens as a means to improve access to healthy and affordable food. To build momentum, SJLI held meetings with school officials from Lennox Unified School District to discuss opportunities for a school garden program. Five schools were selected – Dolores Huerta Elementary, Moffett Elementary, Lennox Middle School, Buford Elementary, and Felton Elementary. Faculty and teachers at all five schools agreed that SJLI's school garden project would be an effective way to increase healthy food consumption among students and families. "The project was a win-win for us," said Derek Steele, Health Equity Programs Director at SJLI. "We were able to coordinate nutrition classes at the schools through the garden curriculum while also combining these efforts with the community gardens at the schools." In addition, SJLI was successful in generating a partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department in Inglewood to launch community gardens as part of Champions for Change P2P Projects at Queens Park.

Today, situated outside of the SJLI office is a robust community garden with a vibrant mural as the backdrop. On any given day, student volunteers and community residents trickle in, gathering shovels and gloves to work in the garden. A wide assortment of vegetables, from kale to sweet potatoes, fill planter boxes that run alongside the wall. This garden is one of seven that have been planted thanks to SJLI's P2P projects, and it represents just one of SJLI's many innovative initiatives that harness the ideas, voices, and leadership of youth and community members.



Community garden at Social Justice Learning Institute. Photo by Maureen Silva, Prevention Institute.





Champions for Change nutrition education class at Edward Vincent Senior Center. Photo by Maureen Silva, Prevention Institute.

Cultivating a network of peer educators to encourage healthy eating

To create a robust network of peer educators, SJLI worked with partners and the community to disseminate flyers to libraries, employment offices, and senior centers. “Because we are in Lennox, it was important for us to have Latino peer educators on our team,” said Nicole Steele, Health Equity Programs Manager and Champions for Change Project Coordinator at SJLI. “We looked at a variety of ages, cultures, and genders so that peer educators could relate to everyone they wanted to reach in the community.”

Once a week, seniors gather at Edward Vincent Senior Center for a nutrition education class to share

“ The project was a win-win for us. We were able to coordinate nutrition classes at the schools through the garden curriculum while also combining these efforts with the community gardens at the schools.”

– Derek Steele, Health Equity Programs Director at SJLI

stories of culturally relevant foods that will become recipes in their community cookbook. To support the weekly lesson on healthy snacking, peer educators test simple healthy snacks that participants can make at home. “It has been an amazing experience for us to see participants eating healthier,” stated Peer Educator Raynice Moreland. “When the community understands how to plant and harvest their own food, this inspires them to eat healthier with their families and even start a garden at home.”

By the end of 2014, SJLI delivered more than 200 nutrition education classes to adult audiences. Community gardens have also become a focal point for SJLI’s P2P approach to integrate place-based projects with school and community education efforts aimed at enhancing fruit and vegetable consumption. Resident engagement at community gardens paired with garden-based nutrition education offers students, teachers, parents, and community members a space to learn about nutrition in a new way and facilitate hands-on experience growing their own food. “Creating multiple entry points for folks to be involved allows the community to become evangelists of this work,” says Derek Steele. “People are leveraging the project to change each other’s lives in the neighborhood.”

SJLI launches first Inglewood farmers’ market – a promising model for building a healthier community

A major priority for SJLI was to develop the first farmers’ market in Inglewood, representing a significant opportunity to bring Inglewood access to healthy and locally grown foods. Through community forums and city council meetings, SJLI drew support for the farmers’ market from the Inglewood City Manager, the department of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, the City’s Planning Division, and community-based groups and residents. The group selected downtown Inglewood for the farmers’ market to support local Inglewood businesses in conjunction with the market.

In September 2015, the City Council approved a conditional agreement for the Inglewood farmers’ market to be held every third Thursday through the end of 2015. The market is also unique in requiring strong nutrition standards for prepared foods, and prohibiting vendors from selling deep-fried foods, soft drinks, and candy. Vendors are also required to serve at least one fruit or vegetable with meals sold at the market. Recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits can access their food benefits electronically by using their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card at the point of sale. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), a federally-funded health and nutrition program, is also accepted at the market. Through the Market Match program, California’s healthy food incentive program that matches customers’ federal nutrition assistance benefits at farmers’ markets, SNAP recipients receive a dollar for dollar match for up to ten dollars, further encouraging purchase of fresh produce.





Aeroponic vertical gardens at Social Justice Learning Institute. Photo by Maureen Silva, Prevention Institute.

“ Creating multiple entry points for folks to be involved allows the community to become evangelists of this work. People are leveraging the project to change each other’s lives in the neighborhood.”

– Derek Steele, Health Equity Programs Director at SJLI

The Inglewood farmers’ market demonstrates the importance of implementing place-based nutrition initiatives in addition to providing peer education, to make it easier for residents to make healthier choices. By moving beyond promotion, SJLI is using P2P education and community support to improve local residents’ access to fruits and vegetables, and to improve health outcomes in Inglewood and Lennox.

Building a Foundation to Foster Future Growth

SJLI is currently engaging the community to update Inglewood’s General Plan. The organization is discussing strategies that health practitioners and advocates can use to build relationships with planners and other public officials to prioritize healthy development in the City of Inglewood. Proposed updates will explore opportunities for Inglewood

to further improve access to fresh and affordable produce, minimize urban blight, and promote urban gardens and green spaces. If passed, this amendment would continue the trend in making healthy choices easier for the residents of Inglewood.

SJLI is also considering different ways to engage additional partners such as parent groups and resident leaders to generate ongoing support for the farmers’ market, community gardens, and future health initiatives in Inglewood and Lennox. “We know that we need the commitment from the schools and the community to work together. An all-hands-on-deck approach is necessary to ensure that the work started lasts for years to come.” says Nicole.

Through SJLI, Champions for Change peer educators have been instrumental in engaging residents in community garden efforts, developing a farmers’ market in Inglewood, and exploring ways to lay the groundwork for healthy planning and development. “Our goal has been to develop projects, especially with young people, that improve academic performance, increase access to healthy and sustainable foods, and advocate for environmental justice,” said Derek Steele, Health Equity Programs Director at SJLI. “Community development is at the center of our work, and we are continually looking to increase engagement of our residents to support the health of individuals and families.”

St. Francis Medical Center



Vida Sana Walking Club. Photo courtesy of St. Francis Medical Center.

Comprehensive Policy Change to Advance Health in Compton and Lynwood

Situated in the heart of Los Angeles County, two communities—Lynwood and Compton—are taking major strides to ensure that more residents have access to healthy food and safe places to be active. Lynwood residents and city stakeholders are taking active steps to increase access to park space. Currently the city has less than 1.6 acres of park land per 1,000 residents, approximately half the county average.^{1,2} In Compton, more than 50% of children are drinking one or more soda every day.³ Further, these two communities continue to have disproportionately high rates of diet-related chronic disease compared to the rest of Los Angeles County.

St. Francis Medical Center, a healthcare provider, organizer, educator and convener in Southeast Los Angeles, is implementing Champions for Change P2P Projects to address these issues. With a focus on community resident leadership, St. Francis works with community partners and residents to advance policies and practices that make it easier for residents in these

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Developed the Vida Sana Coalition, a resident coalition that championed the Safe and Healthy Parks Resolution to institute healthier vending options and smoke-free parks in the City of Lynwood
- Established the Food and Beverage Policy at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church in Compton to prioritize healthy food and beverage options
- Implemented a robust organic community garden at St. Lawrence of Brindisi Catholic Church in Compton
- Launched the Lynwood Walking Club at parks across Lynwood with support from Mayor Solache and City Council

¹ Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. *Parks and Public Health in Los Angeles County: A Cities and Communities Report*; May 2016.

² 2011 Los Angeles County Health Survey; Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Estimates are based on self-reported data by a random sample of 8,036 Los Angeles County adults and 6,013 parents/guardians/primary caretakers of children, representative of the population in Los Angeles County.

³ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. *California Health Interview Survey: CHIS 2005*. Los Angeles, CA.



Champions for Change nutrition education class graduates. Photo courtesy of St. Francis Medical Center.

“ The Peer-to-Peer program is a model that prioritizes engagement from residents, particularly among Latino and African American communities in Lynwood and Compton. Most educators are from the community itself, allowing a safe space for participants to share any challenges they have related to healthy eating.”

– Gisela Carrasco, Champions for Change Project Coordinator

areas to eat healthier foods and engage in more physical activity. Serving both Lynwood and Compton, St. Francis has created a Healthy Parks Resolution in the City of Lynwood, implemented healthy food and beverage standards with local churches, and established two organic community gardens at a large Catholic Parish in Compton and at their medical center.

Facilitating peer based learning to cultivate opportunities for healthy eating and activity

St. Francis recruited community leaders to become peer educators from its Vida Sana Wellness Program, an initiative that was already providing nutrition education classes and physical activity programs at no cost to participants. According to the previous Champions for Change Project Coordinator, Gisela Carrasco: “The P2P program is a model that prioritizes engagement from residents, particularly among Latino and African American communities in Lynwood and Compton. Most educators are from the community itself, allowing a safe space for participants to share any challenges they have related to healthy eating.” Peer educators complete a series of nutrition education trainings provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. The first half of the P2P classes focus on healthy eating with interactive cooking demonstrations: “We’ve started seeing participants trying new foods and recipes, and sharing this information with their entire families,” says Gisela Carrasco. Classes end with a fitness lesson, like Zumba, to build physical activity skills and increase activity levels of the group.

Seeding change with church leaders - creating a language for health through a food and beverage policy

Based on participant feedback, St. Francis decided to work with local church leaders to explore opportunities to improve the food and beverages offered at church functions, typically high in sugar, fat, and salt. St. Francis established a collaborative of church-goers and congregation leaders from the Health Ministry at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church and other local churches. With support from St. Francis, Health Ministry members developed a draft policy of healthy food guidelines that recommended fruits and vegetables during meals, a wider variety of nutrient-dense snacks and foods, and replacement of sugar-sweetened beverages with healthier choices like water and low fat milk. Ultimately, the Food and Beverage Policy was adopted by Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church, and signed by Father Armando with support from the head of food preparation, Don Carlos Garcia. The policy has also been well-received by the community, including the peer educators. For example, Isabel Roman – a peer educator - was pleasantly surprised to find water being offered in place of soda at a recent event at the church, something she attributes to the recently adopted policy.



Community residents planting in edible church gardens. Photo courtesy of St. Francis Medical Center

A labor of love for sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables

Working with St. Lawrence of Brindisi Catholic Church in Compton, the Healthy Ministry also established an organic community garden, and Champions for Change peer educators began working with families and children at the church gardens to demonstrate how food is grown in conjunction with holding nutrition education classes on-site. “On Sundays at St. Lawrence Church, I set up a ReThink Your Drink table and promoted spa water to community members that attend service,” says peer educator, Priscilla Renteria. “During church, I am invited to make announcements to promote the community garden and relay important health messages to the congregation.” This signals a new way for churches in Lynwood and Compton to demonstrate leadership around healthy lifestyles.

A running start to success – engaging City Council in Lynwood healthy parks movement

While healthy food and beverage standards were being launched with local church leaders, Lynwood residents were simultaneously working to establish healthier, safer city parks. The Vida Sana Coalition emerged in 2015, stemming from peer-led nutrition education classes that also provided the community with a forum to convene and discuss developing healthy communities.

The coalition was ambitious, and set a goal to improve local Lynwood parks through development of a Safe and Healthy Parks Resolution. St. Francis staff and The Vida Sana Coalition provided support by identifying core policy objectives: smoke-free parks, healthy vending within park facilities, improved physical activity structures, and park safety and maintenance. A collaborative model with dual funding from Choose Health LA Kids and Champions for Change projects paved the way for St. Francis to build effective partnerships with the American Heart Association, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, the chamber of commerce, and other neighborhood agencies. Using the policy adoption model as a framework, the coalition and partner agencies worked to gather relevant data, engage stakeholders, educate city council members, and develop policy language for creating healthier parks.

In February 2016, The Safe and Healthy Parks Resolution was adopted – symbolizing a landmark in innovation and a model for designing healthier communities. The Resolution represents a comprehensive approach to chronic disease prevention, and demonstrates the potential for community parks to build social cohesion and increase safety.

The Vida Sana Coalition continues to build momentum for safe and active parks through the Lynwood Walking Club, which hosts walking and running events in the city. Supported by Lynwood’s Mayor Solache, and the city council, the

“ It has been exciting to have so much support from Council members and the mayor. I am very happy to be part of a team that is so involved in making change in the community.”

– Gisela Carrasco, Champions for Change Project Coordinator





Mayor Solache at Vida Sana’s Walking Club 5K kick-off event. Photo courtesy of St. Francis Medical Center.

fun runs and community walks represent an opportunity to engage residents, but are also a policy and organizing tool to convene communities in support of physical activity. “It has been exciting to have so much support from Council members and the mayor,” says the current Champions for Change Project Coordinator, Griselda Sanchez. “I am very happy to be part of a team that is so involved in making change in the community.”

Building a Foundation to Foster Future Growth

The Vida Sana Coalition serves as a community hub, linking stakeholders such as City Council and other groups in building a healthier Lynwood. Members from the coalition regularly reach out to Lynwood City Council members to show their continued support for The Safe and Healthy Parks Resolution.

Some residents and church members disagree with the recent changes, but St. Francis staff, peer educators, and community members continue to make a strong case for a healthier food environment. “This work doesn’t happen overnight. It has been a process,” says Griselda Sanchez, “We know how important it is to establish a good relationship with the community so that when we are challenged in reaching our goals, we can turn to the community to help support us in implementing the community strategies we’ve identified together.” St. Francis and partners continue to use the P2P strategy to build healthier environments using community-centered approaches.

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– Gisela Carrasco, Champions for Change Project Coordinator

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Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA)



Champions for Change nutrition education class at the Central Avenue farmers' market. Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.

Incentivizing Healthy Eating and Fresh Food Access in South Los Angeles

Los Angeles County is a rich agricultural region with a climate conducive to growing a wide variety of produce year round. Farmers across the region sell fruits and vegetables to distributors, larger-scale grocers, and directly to patrons through community-supported agriculture projects and farmers' markets. There are nearly 140 farmers' markets across Los Angeles County, including nine in South Los Angeles.¹ However, for many of these communities, agricultural abundance doesn't always translate to easy and affordable access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

While there is no single solution to healthy food access in South LA, the movement around farmers' markets is expanding to support availability of local fruits and vegetables. Founded in 1991, SEE-LA specializes in establishing Certified Farmers' Markets in Los Angeles County— with an emphasis on improving access to fresh, local food in low-income

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Launched Champions for Change nutrition education projects in Glassell Park, Watts, and Central Avenue farmers' markets in South Los Angeles
- Instituted and expanded Market Match, California's healthy food incentive program to double customers' federal nutrition assistance benefits on-site at all three farmers' markets
- Expanded Champions for Change nutrition education classes to 31 additional sites, including nearby community centers, schools, and public libraries to increase reach in South Los Angeles

¹ California Department of Food and Agriculture; 2013 Certified Farmers Markets by County.

neighborhoods. With support from the Champions for Change P2P Projects, SEE-LA's work demonstrates how a multi-pronged approach of education and improved access to healthy foods can lead to behavior change.

The Central Avenue Farmers' Market, which has been a community institution since its inception in 2003, is one of SEE-LA's early successes to increase access to fresh, affordable produce in Los Angeles. Located at the corner of 43rd and Central Ave. in South (Central) Los Angeles, the weekly market links farmers and food vendors with community members who stock up on flavorful fruits, veggies, nuts, and dried fruits. Aguas frescas—including cucumber-mint and watermelon—quench customers' thirst. "These juices are healthier and have less sugar than soda because we make them with real fruit," says one of the market vendors. "Our customers are happy that they have the option to buy a healthy beverage here at the market."

SEE-LA also worked to increase knowledge and awareness around healthy eating practices. "The closest places for people to buy foods are liquor and convenience stores that typically do not offer fresh fruits and vegetables," says Cara Elio, MPH, RD, the Champions for Change Project Coordinator at SEE-LA. "The Hispanic and Latino community that traditionally cooked most of their meals at home are leaning more toward fast food options." To address the issue, SEE-LA initiated the Pompea Smith Good Cooking/Buena Cocina Nutrition Education Program, offering nutrition education on-site at the Watts and Central Avenue farmers' markets. These classes, offered during farmers' market hours, strengthen participant knowledge about the health benefits of consuming local fresh fruits and vegetables, and encourage healthy cooking at home. The combination of education and access incentivizes healthy behavior, and creates a stronger customer base for the markets.

Cultivating a peer educator network to foster good nutrition

To initiate the project, SEE-LA staff recruited Champions for Change peer educators to teach nutrition education classes at the farmers' market. Adding to their local credibility, peer educators are also provided trainings to build their knowledge and skills about nutritious foods and healthy beverage options. SEE-LA uses each series of classes to recruit the next cadre of peer educators. As project coordinator Carla Elio has discovered: "The strongest peer educators are individuals that are active participants in class. They understand the curriculum from a participant point of view and are deeply engaged in promoting healthy foods in their community."

"The closest places for people to buy foods are liquor and convenience stores that typically do not offer fresh fruits and vegetables. The Hispanic and Latino community that traditionally cooked most of their meals at home are leaning more toward fast food options."

– Cara Elio, MPH, RD, Champions for Change Project Coordinator at SEE-LA





Champions for Change nutrition education class participants at Lawndale Community Center. Photo by Vanessa Shih, Prevention Institute.

“SEE-LA’s model is unique in that we are running our nutrition classes right inside the farmers’ market. When the class is over, participants can step out into the market and shop for fresh fruits and vegetables that they can use to prepare the recipes we used in class.”

The Pompea Smith Good Cooking/ Buena Cocina Nutrition Education Program is hands-on. Weekly cooking demonstrations feature seasonal fruits and vegetables sourced right from the market. To engage South LA’s deeply rooted Latino population, nutrition education is also offered in Spanish, allowing participants and peer educators to redefine traditional meal preparation by substituting healthier, flavorful ingredients. “SEE-LA’s model is unique in that we are running our nutrition classes right inside the farmers’ market,” mentions Cara Elio. “When the class is over, participants can step out into the market and shop for fresh fruits and vegetables

that they can use to prepare the recipes we used in class.” Ms. Shirley, one of the class participants who has benefitted from the program, says simply: “It’s changed my life.” Ms. Shirley shops at the market regularly and has drastically changed her diet as a result of what she’s learned in the classes. She encourages her grandchildren to eat healthier too.

Farmers’ markets spur growth for healthy food access

In conjunction with peer education, SEE-LA is also promoting programs such as CalFresh/SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to incentivize and subsidize healthy food purchasing at the markets. Patrons can now use their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card at the markets to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. These efforts were expanded in May 2014 when SEE-LA partnered with two food justice organizations, the Ecology Center and Hunger Action Los Angeles (HALA), to increase the Market Match program through a First 5 Los Angeles sponsorship. This program matches CalFresh benefits dollar-for-dollar up to ten dollars. SEE-LA’s Market Match program continues to grow with a recent influx of funding from the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant awarded by the USDA, and increases customer purchasing power to buy fresh fruits and vegetables while benefiting farmers and the local economy.

Growing an effective model to support healthy food access

SEE-LA has facilitated over 275 nutrition education classes in Los Angeles with Champions for Change P2P Projects, and expanded programs beyond the farmers' markets to 31 additional sites, including community centers, school parent groups, and public libraries in South Los Angeles. Participants have reported eating more fruits and vegetables after attending nutrition education classes and indicate they are more confident in their ability to select healthier choices.

In May 2014, with support from the Los Angeles City Council District 13, the USDA, and Goodwill Industries of Southern California, SEE-LA launched the Glassell Park Farmers' Market. The market promises to be an exciting addition to the Glassell Park neighborhood, a place where residents can gain new access to fresh fruits and vegetables, have a safe space to meet, and take advantage of nutrition education classes and the Market Match program.

SEE-LA has demonstrated a novel combination of bridging community assets through P2P education at farmers markets. The market-based incentives and financial subsidies paired with SEE-LA's P2P projects have also succeeded in encouraging community members from Watts, Glassell Park, and South Los Angeles to shop locally, access fresh fruits and vegetables, and prepare foods that otherwise would not be widely accessible or affordable for many residents.

Developing a relationship with the local corner store: A partnership to foster healthy development

SEE-LA recently collaborated with The Central Store in Watts to initiate a healthy corner store transformation. The Central Store, adjacent to the Watts Healthy Farmers' Market, is part of a neighborhood with many liquor stores and fast-food restaurants. In partnership with The Central Store's owner and



Healthy corner store transformation at The Central Store in Watts. Photo courtesy of SEE-LA.



Healthy corner store transformation at The Central Store in Watts. Photo courtesy of SEE-LA.

the Los Angeles County’s Healthy Food Retail Program, SEE-LA provides in-store signage, help with rearranging aisles to highlight nutritious foods, and promotion of healthier fare. Over the next two years, SEE-LA hopes to support gradual improvements to the store’s design, including the addition of refrigerators dedicated to healthy beverages and a wider range of promotional materials highlighting healthier choices throughout the store. SEE-LA also plans to foster a partnership between The Central Store and the Watts Healthy Farmers’ Market to improve sustainability of the recent market makeover, and create a hub for improved healthy food access in Watts.

Building a Foundation to Foster Future Growth

SEE-LA predicts a growing need to leverage connections with City Council: “We’re always striving to form better linkages with City Council,” mentions James Haydu, Executive Director of SEE-LA. “Many City Council members understand that our farmers’ markets are the focal point for fresh food access in their community. There are other members of City Council we are looking to form better relationships with to demonstrate the impact of farmers’ markets and the value of the P2P projects in our communities.” Strengthened relations with council members are an opportunity to increase political awareness about healthy food access concerns and can further direct policy attention towards the issue in Los Angeles. In addition, SEE-LA hopes to integrate peer educators and communities into the process. Through attention to partnerships at every level, SEE-LA is cultivating a win-win for farmers and for community residents.



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