



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story and Lessons Learned

Creating New Community Gardens and Maintaining Existing Gardens successfully through Collective Impact

Intervention Summary

The Challenge faced in our community based on SNAP-Ed County Profiles provided by CDPH, Del Norte County has an overall food insecurity rate of 18.6% and a child food insecurity incidence rate of 40.8%. The percentage of low income population that had limited access to healthy food is higher than the state rate, 10.2% and 3.1% respectively. The food insecurity, access to, and consumption of fruits and vegetables are major issues. The PSE topic that we selected to address these issues was; to promote and maintain the existing community gardens and to establish new community gardens.

Partnering with Tobacco Use Prevention Program, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Program, and Community Food Council with the support of local Champions for Change leaderships, this PSE topic has been successfully implemented.

First we created a garden task force made up of local Champions, backbone organizations, and community partners in order to address the issues so we could implement and achieve the PSE goals. Three Champion gardeners were recruited and trained to implement and participate in the intervention. Visual assessments and key informant interviews were taken to evaluate the needs of each existing community and school garden in the underserved areas. The task force created the work plan for each garden to meet the needs of low income communities, to maintain the existing community and school gardens, and to establish new gardens at three low income government subsidized apartment housings and a school garden in Smith River.

Based on the needs assessment, the Community Wellness Center garden was selected, garden work days were implemented successfully with technical support and leadership from the Champion gardeners. The nutrition, Rethink Your Drink and physical activity messages were all incorporated into garden work days. The clients, through the referrals from Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs and Social Service program, participated in the garden work day as a part of life skill building work experience.

Gardening is therapeutic for those clients who have mental and physical challenges. One of the Clients said, "I am looking forward to getting up and coming to the garden, it is so rewarding and makes me feel good" Gardening is a way to build the life and community together. We have received positive feedback and most people expressed the value of and need for more community gardens.

Partnering with Tobacco Use Prevention Program and Home Depot, the intervention work to build the new community gardens at the three low income apartment housings has been implemented successfully. The task force built trust and assured mutual objectives and common motivation and support of the apartment managers and tenants through consistent and open communication. The garden lumber for the community gardens was donated by the local business, Home Depot and the new gardens have been established at the low income housings. Now we are on a new journey with apartment managers and residents to empower them to maintain and sustain the gardens successfully.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Each existing community garden is faced with its own challenges to maintain and to bring out its fullest potential for a variety of reasons. The biggest barrier is lack of leaderships to build a sense of shared responsibility and ownership from the gardeners. The running and maintaining of a community garden to its full potential, to be more robust and effective, serving more as a cultural and social hub will require ongoing support from funded and non-funded organizations to cultivate strong community based garden leadership. Community empowerment through garden leadership training and workshops is essential to bring awareness and knowledge. Culturally tailored garden trainings and workshops with different languages, Hmong, Spanish, and Chinese will be beneficial to overcome some barriers. Champions for Change from different ethnicities will support to overcome these cultural barriers.

We are challenged by the success of the program. Gardens are promoted to increase healthy food access and strengthen food security with added outcome of health benefits of individuals and community. There is a great need for more community gardens that are closer to where people live especially for those who have transportation or health issues. Building more community gardens in the residential areas and promoting container gardens as a substitute for residents who don't have space will benefit many in the low income population to reduce food cost and increase food security.

Community partnerships and collaboration will be essential to achieve PSE goals. Promoting bartering, community gleaning or finding a way for the individuals to sell their excess to farmers market will be another way to sustain and strengthen local food economy.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

What are your short-term (1-2 years) and long-term (2 years and beyond) goals for your intervention strategy? How will you achieve them and what stakeholders will contribute, support and help sustain your strategy?

Our short term goals include:

- Supporting and facilitating “Meet and Greet” meetings to build trust between the tenants and future gardeners
- Supporting and conducting garden based nutrition education, skill and leadership building workshops at the community gardens and school gardens
- Cultivating strong community driven garden leadership through leadership building workshops and garden training
- Recruiting new Garden Champions at the target schools and community gardens
- Providing garden newsletters and information along with seed packets to community organizations (Wellness Clinic, Veteran Hall, Food Banks, Dept. Health and Human Services) to promote gardening and sustainable living
- Attending School Wellness meeting, Community Food Council meeting, Community Health in All Policy or related wellness promoting meetings to promote community gardens and build collaboration and partnerships
- Promoting community events or media events at community and school gardens
- Supporting Community Food Council’s current Master Gardner’s program and coordinate with local Master Gardeners to provide garden workshops and trainings

Long Term goals include:

- Each community garden and school garden will be Maintained successfully with Farm-to-Fork and Farm-To-School initiative
- School gardens will serve as learning labs for school curriculum and produce will be sold into school nutrition program creating revenue for sustaining the gardens
- Each community garden and school garden will be maintained by the garden Champion who is knowledgeable, present, encouraging, and able to offer educational program
- Community bartering and gleaning project will be supported and promoted
- Providing ongoing training and technical support to the Garden Champions
- Establishing more new community gardens, back yard gardens and container gardens will be supported and promoted

- Partnerships will be formed with the various government funded and non-funded organizations, with a shared vision, the Community Food Council will be the leading partner to support this PSE
- Working with decision makers, stakeholders and community residents we shall look for ways to utilize vacant lots for community gardens and transform the gardens to feed the hungry and vulnerable populations
- Seeking a legal regulation and laws which will support local residential gardeners sell excess harvest to farmers markets and to other residents in the neighborhood which will have the benefit of strengthening food security and sustainability

Contact information about this Narrative

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