



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

### Making Small Changes to Create Positive Futures

#### Intervention Summary

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Kern County is the least healthy (County) in California.”<sup>1</sup> Kern County is rated the highest in terms of occurrence of heart disease, the second highest county in terms of occurrence of diabetes and the 2010 Census lists our population’s obesity rate was 60%. Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS) is partnering with Kern County Public Health (KCPH), and California Department of Public Health’s Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch with funding from USDA SNAP-Ed (CDPH-NEOPB) to target high risk youth and educate them about how to lead healthy lives. The first step was to create a Youth Engagement Project with the Cal Safe parenting teens at Blanton and Community Learning Center Tech (CLC Tech). Slowly, the program has been able to make a positive environmental impact. A small garden was built on the side of the daycare at the school that has positively impacted the whole school population through exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables and the joy of gardening. Recently, we have been asked about the possibility of combining forces with teachers and a small academy on campus to create a larger edible garden and implement taste test and nutrition lessons that will coincide with the harvest.

#### Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

As a NEOP instructor I’ve encountered many challenges and barriers within the Youth Engagement Project at Blanton/CLC Tech. The students participating in the Cal Safe program were perpetually transient; either from low attendance, moving to independent study, or returning to their original school site. I not only encountered challenges with attendance, I encountered barriers with the students’ attitudes. Many had established ideas about how to eat, how to exercise and what to feed their children. Over the past

year the Youth Engagement Program at Blanton/CLC Tech has blossomed literally and figuratively.

The program has literally blossomed due to the addition of garden boxes at the daycare. The program director received a small grant to build two garden boxes. The students along with their children have tended and harvested the garden and enjoyed the fruits of their labor. The students have also blossomed figuratively. The initial barriers I encountered with the students attitudes has slowly evolved. They have become willing to take on the life-style changes presented in the approved Youth Engagement Guide “Empowering Youth with Nutrition and Physical Activity and taking part in the *Rethink your Drink* campaign, as well as adding more fruits and vegetables to their diets. Most recently, during summer school, a small group of Cal Safe students became Serv Safe certified and began to teach their peers using approved recipes to create taste tests.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

Our Short terms goals are to continue educating the Cal Safe students with gardening and empowering them to educate their peers by example as well as nutrition lessons and taste tests.

Our Long term goals are to create a sustained program, including, a larger garden to educate the entire student population at Blanton/CLC Tech. Combining forces with the school administration, teachers and local farms. Contributing stake holders include Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Blanton school administration and Kern County Public Health, and California Department of Public Health’s Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Brach with funding from USDA SNAP-Ed.

<sup>1</sup>(CDC <http://www.cdc.gov/nationalhealthyworksites/communities/kern-county.html>, Updated September 2015)

## **Contact information about this Narrative**

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