



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

### Title

Health Ambassadors: Inspiring a New Generation of Agriculture Enthusiasts

### Intervention Summary

The Health Ambassadors program at Luther Burbank High School has a strong focus on gardening, sustainability, and agriculture. Students in the Health Ambassadors program help maintain the Burbank Urban Garden (BUG) and support local elementary and middle school garden programs by assisting with garden builds and gardening technical assistance. The young Health Ambassadors also play a role in educating other youth on nutrition, and healthy eating. Correspondingly, the Health Ambassadors program teaches students the importance of policy in sustaining urban gardens, agriculture and the overall food environment. Through this model, the Health Ambassadors are not only educating themselves and, changing their own attitudes and behaviors on healthy eating but also gaining valuable skills, like public speaking and policy development.

During this past year, the Health Ambassadors program has had an influential role on one student- Amanda. Growing up, Amanda's family did not know much about how to eat healthy; fruits and vegetables were rarely encouraged let alone available at home. As Amanda's involvement with the Health Ambassadors grew, she slowly started changing her eating habits and became a strong spokesperson for the program. She learned more about the process and benefits of growing and eating local, organic produce and soon decided she would only eat produce that was grown organically. As she lived in a food desert with very little access to fresh, local produce, Amanda would often borrow family members' cars and or ride numerous buses to various farmers' markets and farms to purchase her food. She would not be deterred from implementing her new lifestyle.

As a Health Ambassador, Amanda also took part in numerous agriculture related projects and campaigns. She worked to educate policymakers on the City of Sacramento's Urban Agriculture Ordinance and school board members on the importance of supporting school gardens. Amanda also represented the BUG at Soil Born's *Day on the Farm* event and sold plant starts at the Mack Road – Valley Hi Farmers' Market to raise money to support BUG. Participation in these activities led her to realize she wanted to study Urban Agriculture at UC Davis. This spring Amanda applied for and was accepted into UC Davis' Urban Agriculture program. She will be the first person in her family to attend college. Amanda credits her career choice on her involvement in the Health Ambassadors program.

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

The main barrier with the Health Ambassadors program at Luther Burbank is the lack of interest by students at the school. Most students who are a part of the program are involved in this Small Learning Community due to their interest in gardening. Most, if not all, do not have much background or interest in other areas such as policy, food justice, or public health. Moving forward, to increase student participation, attempts will be made to show how gardens/agriculture are tied to other areas and disciplines, such as Science.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

To ensure sustainability and involvement of the Burbank Urban Garden at Luther Burbank High School, the following are short-term intervention strategies:

- Speaking to heads of other clubs and classes in other Small Learning Communities to involve them in both afterschool and regular school day garden work  
Showcase how the garden can support other clubs and actual student lessons

Ultimately, the Health Ambassadors program hopes to inspire more students and families to improve the nutrition environment in their communities. Long-term goals include:

- Expose and recruit more students into the program to have broader impact
- Develop a strong mentorship program with local middle and elementary schools to increase exposure to agriculture at an earlier age

## Contact information about this Narrative

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