

# Policy, Systems, and Environmental Success Stories for the County of San Diego's 2015 Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant

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

### Health Ministry: An Essential Component of Every Church

#### Intervention Summary

Promoting healthy eating and active living in the faith community is a unique opportunity to engage congregation members and make sustainable, healthy changes both within and outside of their faith environments. UC San Diego's *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has been successful in assisting many churches and faith-based organizations across San Diego County's low-income communities in promoting healthy eating and active living.

The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* is a part of and supported with funding from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHSA receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

Over the past year, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has partnered with seven African-American churches in a variety of San Diego County communities with health disparities to create health ministries. According to the Health Ministry Association, health ministries (i.e., church programs) include "the many ministries of a faith community that promote health. Health is viewed as a gift from God and a way of relational living in community." Some of the health ministries supported by the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* provide opportunities for congregants to pursue a combined journey toward health and faith.

Among the efforts to increase healthy food and physical activity environments within these churches, there are a number of policy, systems, and environmental changes that point toward overall advances in faith-based wellness. One example is the program's partnership with the Progressive District Health Ministry Auxiliary to build health ministries into more faith-based systems. This auxiliary is a network of local churches with oversight provided by the California Missionary Baptist State Convention. The churches work together and in partnership with the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* to develop and maintain strong health ministries. Currently, the auxiliary is composed of 17 local churches with a collective goal to develop and implement sustainable wellness programs and policies.

In addition, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* assisted with the development of the Officer's Guide to the Health Ministry Leadership and Committee and by supporting the creation of a work plan and strategy for the Progressive Baptist District Association's wellness activities and programs for the upcoming year.



Much of the aforementioned progress would not be possible without successful collaborative relationships. For many years, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has built rapport with key community-based organizations and advisory committees, including Mental Health America, Southeast Collaborative Group, San Diego Congregation for Change, and the Mental Health African American Collaborative. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has acted as a bridge to the faith communities by networking with agencies that can play key roles in supporting these communities.

Another important ingredient to successful, sustainable health ministries is the recruitment of champions from within each congregation. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* identified and supported champions in African-American churches, engaging them in a train-the-trainer model, media exposure, volunteer engagement and motivation, nutrition education classes, and step-by-step instruction on sustaining health initiatives and programs.

## Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Building a systems-level change, such as a health ministry, can be a lengthy and challenging process. Because every church and surrounding community is unique, it can take several months to a year to adopt policy, systems, and environmental changes in a faith-based setting. Another challenge has been figuring out a strategy to distribute culturally relevant materials to support the many diverse, newly formed health ministries. A solution that is successfully addressing this challenge is the NEOP's Body & Soul Program, a wellness program developed for African-American churches. Finally, to create lasting success once the health ministries have been established, it is crucial to follow up with technical assistance, resources, and support for participating churches.



## Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Many of the participating churches realize that financial backing may be necessary to sustain a health ministry. In addition, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* is encouraging churches to conduct healthy fundraisers to offset costs for health and wellness activities. The program also plans to present on behalf of churches the best practices, lessons learned, and key successes at faith-based forums, workshops, conventions, and conferences. This will help disseminate the model and build greater awareness and support among faith-based communities about the importance of health ministries.

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This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch with funding from USDA SNAP-Ed, known in California as CalFresh. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. CalFresh provides assistance to low-income households and can help buy nutritious food for better health. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. For important nutrition information, visit [www.CaChampionsForChange.net](http://www.CaChampionsForChange.net).



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

### ***Harvest of the Month: Building Local Procurement Practices in San Diego County School Districts***

#### **Intervention Summary**

Broadly defined, “Farm to School” is a program that connects schools (K-12) and local agriculture (e.g., school gardens and farms, commercial farms) with the objective of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional agriculture (adapted from National Farm to School Network).

In Southern California, Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP)-funded agencies supporting school initiatives in San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside counties began collaborating to strengthen the Farm to School movement through the *Harvest of the Month* (HOTM) program. While HOTM traditionally focused on promoting seasonal California produce, in Southern California it has developed into a coordinated strategy to assist school districts with shifting to local procurement and purchasing practices. The impact of this shift has been powerful: locally based NEOP-funded agencies have worked together to coordinate a Southern California HOTM calendar that emphasizes both seasonal and local produce items that advance school-based nutrition education, in addition to building the local economy and agricultural sector.

The process for the development of the annual Southern California HOTM calendar is important to understand. Every year, Southern California school districts, farmers, and NEOP-funded agencies working with school districts meet for a Southern California regional planning meeting where they discuss, select, and vote on the HOTM calendar. The calendar features only one fruit or vegetable per month, which is easy for school food service to procure, prepare, and serve. Produce items are determined based on

what is available and actively being grown by local farmers that year. Changes in weather, pests, and water supply can drastically alter crop availability from year to year.

San Diego County is a key participant in calendar planning, and is primarily represented by the UC San Diego-Center for Community Health *School Wellness Program*. The *School Wellness Program* is funded by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) NEOP program. HHS receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

To inform development of each year's HOTM calendar, *School Wellness Program* staff provides the county's seasonal crop availability chart reflecting produce being grown by San Diego farmers. This data is gathered and analyzed by a local partner organization, Community Health Improvement Partners. Featured monthly HOTM produce items are rotated each year to ensure students are being exposed to a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables. The annual Southern California HOTM calendar also guides HOTM workbook lessons used by teachers, students, and classrooms throughout the region.

San Diego County is fortunate to have a group that convenes locally for a similar purpose through the San Diego Farm to School Taskforce, which is led by Community Health Improvement Partners as part of the broader San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative. With a mission to increase food knowledge and access to local, healthful foods in the school environment through collaboration, education, environmental change, program development, and outreach, the taskforce is composed of farmers, produce distributors, school district food service staff, community partners, and local universities.

UC San Diego-Center for Community Health *School Wellness Program* staff members serve as the NEOP representatives to the Farm to School Taskforce. Each year, the *School Wellness Program* brings the Southern California HOTM calendar to the taskforce for review, feedback, and approval. The final calendar is then shared with the San Diego County Nutrition Action Partnership (CNAP) for use in nutrition education interventions that go beyond schools and into additional sectors such as retail, worksites, food pantries, and faith-based organizations.

The process for determining the items featured on the annual Southern California HOTM Calendar is intentionally comprehensive, collaborative, and community-driven. As a result, all local stakeholders are vested in the program goals and implementation.

Demand for the San Diego County HOTM in the Classroom program continues to increase. The NEOP *School Wellness Program* is now partnering with 15 school districts to build their capacity to bring local, seasonal produce to students, up from just two districts last year. These districts agree to procure HOTM items from local and

regional farms through their produce distributors. Some districts, including San Diego Unified School District, have also developed videos to showcase the HOTM item and the local farmer who grows it. These “farmer videos” have become extremely popular in participating classrooms and are used in conjunction with the HOTM workbooks developed by the San Bernardino County Office of Education.

*School Wellness Program* staff from UC San Diego ensures program buy-in and success by providing trainings to district and school site food service staff, principals, and classroom teachers. They also provide ongoing technical assistance to help districts develop customized infrastructure for local sourcing, preparation, and delivery to classrooms.

While increasing local procurement, San Diego County’s HOTM program is also building connections between local farmers and school staff, connections that support multilevel systems of engagement. Several local school district food service directors have shared that this is exactly the type of programming and support they need at this time. The collective impact of these NEOP-funded efforts and those of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative’s Farm to School Taskforce is leading to systemic changes for local school districts, distributors, and farmers.

“Vista Unified School District values the partnership with UC San Diego *School Wellness Program* and the broader Farm to School Taskforce collaborative to build our capacity to promote local, seasonal fruits and vegetables,” said Amy Haessly, registered dietitian and Nutrition Education and Training Supervisor at the district. “[We] have worked closely with UC San Diego staff to develop a program model that works for school cafeterias, principals, teachers, students and families.”

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

The San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce adopted shared definitions for local, regional, and California-grown produce. However, guaranteeing that HOTM produce items are truly local remains a challenge when definitions for “local” vary, and when farmers are not able to meet institutional demands. This issue is being addressed through capacity-building strategies developed through the taskforce and school districts’ local produce distributors.

The California Department of Public Health is considering a static HOTM calendar that would differ from the regional framework that has been developed. A static calendar may need to be complemented by the regional calendar to take into consideration key climate issues that might impact crop availability (weather, water access, pests, etc.).

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

Moving forward, NEOP-funded partners such as UC San Diego-Center for Community Health will continue to collaborate with CNAP and other local agencies on the taskforce that are invested in local purchasing practices for schools, and an overall improved local food system in San Diego County. This is a model that will bring about sustained change locally. It can also serve as an example for other communities on how HOTM can be used as a vehicle to advance local procurement and the “Farm to School” movement.

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

### Wyndham San Diego Bayside: Supporting Employees to *Live Well @ Work*

#### Intervention Summary

Chronic diseases are currently the leading cause of death in San Diego County, accounting for \$4.6 billion in direct healthcare costs and over half of all deaths. One in every three San Diego County residents has at least one of the leading four major chronic diseases (i.e., cancer, heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, and pulmonary diseases). Fortunately, targeted worksite wellness programs can be effective in improving health and decreasing costs related to chronic disease, mostly by working to support healthy behaviors among their employees and by creating a healthy work environment. Findings from a meta-analysis of 56 studies of worksite health promotion programs showed an average 27% reduction in sick leave absenteeism, 26% reduction in healthcare costs, 32% decrease in workers' compensation and disability claims, and a \$5.81-to-\$1 return on investment ratio associated with the wellness programs.<sup>1</sup>

San Diego County is home to a large tourism industry, with nearly 500 hotel and motel properties and a total of more than 56,000 rooms available to visitors. Approximately 160,000 San Diegans are employed in the hospitality sector, working in lodging, food service, attractions, and transportation.

Wyndham San Diego Bayside (Wyndham) is a hotel nestled along the harbor in the downtown San Diego Gaslamp Quarter, and employs over 220 residents. In 2013, Wyndham was recruited as a worksite for the Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) *Worksite Wellness Program* to focus on establishing workplace environments that support healthy eating and active living with particular focus on their low-wage employees.

The *Worksite Wellness Program* is led by the UC San Diego-Center for Community Health. It is part of and supported with funding from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) NEOP Program. HHS receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities

A key, up-front strategy for engaging Wyndham in the NEOP *Worksite Wellness Program* was to present evidence to their Human Resource Administrators that maintaining a healthier workforce can lower direct costs such as insurance premiums and workers' compensation claims, and positively impact many indirect costs such as absenteeism and worker productivity. After the presentation, Wyndham signed on to participate in the program because of the company's belief in the importance of providing a supportive work environment for their associates.

Wyndham prioritizes the well-being of their associates. General Manager Joe Eustice explains, "I'm encouraged every day by working with such an inspiring group of individuals. The associates come ready to do their daily jobs with the highest regard for themselves, in the process motivating one another to make huge contributions to each other, their communities, and their families."

The first step in launching the wellness program was establishing a wellness committee as a foundation for decision-making and moving initiatives forward. Wyndham decided to integrate the wellness committee into its existing safety committee, which already included leadership such as Wyndham's executive chef, human resources staff, executive assistant, and marketing/public relations staff, among others. The committee collectively developed an overall mission statement to reduce employees' risk for chronic diseases caused by poor diet or lack of exercise, and to create a greater sense of camaraderie for their employees. Calling the program "Wyndham Wellness," the committee met monthly to strategically plan their activities and initiatives around three key areas: 1) wellness initiatives, 2) community initiatives, and 3) green initiatives. For the wellness initiatives, the committee initially focused their efforts on educational activities. As Wyndham Wellness became established, the committee shifted their focus to include more policy, systems, and environmental change strategies so that wellness efforts could be lasting and impactful.

Wyndham Wellness was developed to offer something for every employee. With the initial focus on employee education, the NEOP *Worksite Wellness Program* provided support by hosting regular "lunch & learn" sessions on topics chosen by employees, including diabetes prevention, healthy cooking on a budget, and mindfulness. Additionally, Wyndham co-hosted annual associate health fairs with the NEOP *Worksite Wellness Program* featuring on-site biometric/preventive screenings, fresh produce

donations, CalFresh screenings, healthy recipe demonstrations, and numerous community resources. Further, Wyndham employees were provided with regular free physical activity opportunities through the popular Friday Fitness Club. Each Friday, different associates or fitness professionals hosted 60-minute fitness classes that included boot camp, Pilates, Zumba, yoga, or jogging. These fitness classes were free and well attended, with roughly 10% of employees participating. In conjunction with its Fitness Club, Wyndham initiated a walking club and established walking routes surrounding the bayside hotel.

Once employees were educated and engaging in these worksite activities, Wyndham strongly felt it was time to change their internal policies and practices to make sustainable changes within their organization. With support from the NEOP *Worksite Wellness Program*, the committee spearheaded the adoption of a Healthy Meeting Policy to provide associates with nutritional food and beverage options during work-sponsored meetings, events, and celebrations. Instead of offering cookies and soda, Wyndham provided employees with whole fruit, vegetable platters, and fruit-infused spa water. This policy adoption represented a major shift in the culture of wellness within the Wyndham's workplace.

Following this policy milestone, Wyndham wanted to provide healthier menu options at the employee cafeteria. Collaborating with their executive chef, Wyndham redesigned its cafeteria menu options to feature local fruits and vegetables at the salad bar and low-fat entrée and side dishes. In the employee break room and cafeteria, a wellness bulletin board prominently showcased free community events, healthy recipes, *Live Well @ Work* newsletters, and upcoming Wyndham Wellness activities.

Wyndham is also currently in the process of adopting a comprehensive lactation accommodation policy with support from the UC San Diego-Center for Community Health's Lactation Supportive Environments initiative, funded by the County of San Diego HHSA. The lactation accommodation policy will provide support and resources to new mothers returning to work who want to continue breastfeeding. This includes access to private locations (that are not restrooms) for the purpose of milk expression. In addition to accommodating employees, Wyndham will have measures in place to accommodate their guests by making future plans to build a designated guest-specific lactation room. This lactation policy will be executed through the Wyndham corporate office headquarters located in New Jersey. Once the policy is adopted, it will influence more than 100 hotels throughout the nation and thousands of employees and hotel guests annually.

Ariannabell Reyes, Assistant Director of Human Resources for Wyndham San Diego Bayside, is one of the project's wellness leaders. She has been instrumental in the success and sustainability of the Wyndham Wellness program. "Our healthy worksite wellness practices transcend from the work environment to the homes of many of our

associates,” Ms. Reyes said of the program. “Fostering healthy practices, investing in wellness education, and actively participating in community initiatives have revolutionized our way of doing business.”

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

The two most significant barriers were identified through key informant interviews with Wyndham’s Human Resource Department wellness leads: 1) lack of a wellness budget and 2) lack of a dedicated staff member to lead these efforts. To overcome these barriers, the NEOP *Worksite Wellness Program* partnered with local community organizations and businesses to provide Wyndham with no-cost reinforcements for employee participation in the various programs. These were effective in motivating employees to participate in the wellness activities and challenges, and in spurring friendly competition. For instance, employees had the opportunity to “win” bicycles, one-month gym memberships, boxes of fresh produce, fitness equipment, and similar health-related incentives.

Although there is not yet a dedicated staff member to lead employee wellness efforts, Wyndham has established a robust wellness committee with seven dedicated staff members representing different departments within the company. The committee built sufficient capacity over the last two years to maintain Wyndham’s progress.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

Overall, the culture of health and wellness at Wyndham has dramatically shifted, as evidenced by a high level of participation in the wellness program as well as the adoption of sustainable policies. The mission of Wyndham Wellness goes beyond building better health but also focuses on social connection, with employee engagement being a priority at every level of the organization.

“I am very proud to work for a company that places emphasis on being healthy, along with providing a great avenue for everyone to *Be Well!*” said Selina Shepherd, Executive Assistant for Wyndham San Diego Bayside. “All of the planned activities are great, however my favorite is the lunch & learns.”

Based on self-reported data from the annual post-implementation surveys by Allison Owen, Human Resource Director for Wyndham San Diego Bayside, the Wyndham Wellness Program has markedly improved employee morale and productivity. There were higher levels of reported engagement and expressed interest in new activities to maintain healthy and active lifestyles.

As a result of these healthy changes to the workplace environment, Wyndham San Diego Bayside became the first designated *Live Well San Diego* hotel on May 22, 2015.

*Live Well San Diego* is the long-term vision of the County of San Diego to create healthy, safe, and thriving communities. Wyndham integrated this vision into its overall wellness program mission, with the new tagline of “Be Well, Live Well, Serve Well.” A flag now waves outside the hotel displaying this message. The *Live Well San Diego* designation and Wyndham San Diego Bayside’s model efforts are now inspiring other businesses in San Diego’s hospitality industry to follow suit and create a healthier environment for their employees.

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

### Kelly Park Lighting Project

#### Intervention Summary

In April 2013, San Diego's North Central Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX<sup>3</sup>) team surveyed over 100 community members in the City of San Diego's Linda Vista neighborhood to identify barriers to physical activity and healthy eating. CX<sup>3</sup> team members included residents who have been trained in policy, systems, and environmental change strategies in addition to staff from Bayside Community Center, a local nonprofit, and from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) North Central Region.

Survey results highlighted a prominent neighborhood concern: the need for lighting at nearby Kelly Park. The park is a popular family exercise destination with amenities like a running trail, soccer field, and playground. During the fall and winter months, when the sun sets earlier, CX<sup>3</sup> team members and engaged residents noticed that families stop exercising because of the limited park lighting. Residents reported feeling unsafe in the park, and as a result were unable to take advantage of the park's physical activity opportunities.

The North Central CX<sup>3</sup> project is part of and supported with funding from the County of San Diego HHSA's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHSA receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

To address residents' concerns, the CX<sup>3</sup> team launched a project to improve the lighting in Kelly Park. They needed more input from the community on where lighting should be placed in Kelly Park, so the CX<sup>3</sup> team surveyed an additional 100 residents. Leveraging a key local resource, the team partnered with an architecture student from the University of San Diego, located in the community of Linda Vista, who compiled the additional survey results and developed a lighting design and map showing locations for potential light placement.

The tough job of getting the City of San Diego to install the much needed lighting marked the next step of their process. CX<sup>3</sup> residents presented survey findings and the park lighting map to various community organizations and decision-makers to gain support, including: the Linda Vista Community Planning Group, Linda Vista Town Council, Linda Vista Recreation Council, and San Diego Councilmember Scott Sherman. Residents also spoke in support of funding for Kelly Park lighting during the San Diego City Council's Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Hearing.

A little more than two years after the original community assessment, the dream for Kelly Park came closer to reality. In June 2015, the Kelly Park lighting project was included as an independent line item in the City of San Diego Fiscal Year 2016 Budget, and lighting improvements are expected to be made by June 2016.

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

The CX<sup>3</sup> team spent an immense amount of time gathering community input, creating the lighting design and map, and building community and decision-maker support for the lighting improvement project. The team overcame these challenges by listening to each other, and drawing on their training as resident leaders to navigate the numerous approval processes involved in this type of community environmental change. Because of the complexities involved in advocating for infrastructure improvements such as park lighting, the team also learned how to interpret and leverage city policy language to justify their proposed changes.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

With the project approved in the City's budget, CX<sup>3</sup> team members and residents are now focused on tracking and making sure lighting is installed according to their plan. Once lighting is added to Kelly Park, the community will have greater access to safe, green space in Linda Vista, providing residents of all ages with more opportunities to be physically active throughout the year, whether it is day or night.



**CX<sup>3</sup> member presenting Kelly Park lighting map to Linda Vista Recreation Council**



**CX<sup>3</sup> members waiting to speak during the San Diego City Council's Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Hearing**

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

### Linda Vista Community Garden: On-site Sales

#### Intervention Summary

The Linda Vista Community Garden was created in summer of 2011 as a community-driven effort to increase resident access to fresh, local produce. The garden started as a small project at local nonprofit Bayside Community Center with a passionate coordinator who was very engaged in the Linda Vista neighborhood. As it grew, the garden attracted additional community resources, including involvement from the Linda Vista Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX<sup>3</sup>) team, which includes residents that have been trained in policy, systems, and environmental change strategies. The team also includes staff from Bayside and from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) North Central Region.

This diverse and collaborative CX<sup>3</sup> team and its contribution to the garden's growing momentum are part of and supported with funding from the HHS Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHS receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

Since the garden produces more than the residents and their families can consume, the CX<sup>3</sup> team sought to sell fresh, pesticide-free produce grown in the garden to Linda Vista residents for an affordable price. In spring of 2015, the CX<sup>3</sup> team created a system to sell produce from the garden directly to community members. In April 2015, the growers began to have on-site sales every Tuesday afternoon.

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

Getting started with selling garden-grown produce in a public market is not as easy as it sounds. There were difficulties for the community stakeholders in interpreting the policy regarding where

and when residents are able to sell produce from the community garden. The team misinterpreted the policy and believed produce could only be sold within 50 feet of the garden, which is located behind the community center. The team asked a Senior Planner at the City of San Diego for clarification. Their willingness to reach out to City staff offered them avenues to become educated and make real progress. It also reflected their training and increased resident capacity to delve into policy and city permitting issues. The planner did some research and offered the solution that they were allowed to sell in the front of the building. The team was excited to move its produce stand to the front where there is more visibility and foot traffic.

Access to land to expand the garden has also been identified as a major issue. Currently, the Linda Vista Community Garden is at full capacity with many residents on a waitlist. However, the school district owns a vacant lot next to the garden, and the team is working with the district to explore expanding the garden onto school property.

### **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

The Linda Vista CX<sup>3</sup> team plans to continue weekly on-site sales in the garden and at Bayside Community Center. They are determined to grow the program to offer more local produce to residents. An identified obstacle to this goal is access to land, but CX<sup>3</sup> team members will continue planning their advocacy activities in favor of increasing this access.



**On-site sales in the Linda Vista Community Garden- April 2015**

## Contact information about this Narrative

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Grant #: 13-20528-02

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

### **CX<sup>3</sup> Youth Spend Summer Creating Positive Change in Southeastern San Diego**

#### **Intervention Summary**

Mayra, a senior at Lincoln High School, walked to school every day for several years on narrow and broken sidewalks, passing faded crosswalks and bike paths. During the summer of 2014, she decided to do something about it by getting involved in her community to improve the environment around her. While most students look forward to relaxing with no schoolwork during summer vacation, Mayra became one of eight youth from Southeastern San Diego involved in *Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention*, a community engagement and improvement program better known as CX<sup>3</sup>. These CX<sup>3</sup> youth devoted their summer to improving the Lincoln Park neighborhood.

First, the youth needed to learn what to look for when assessing their neighborhood environment. CX<sup>3</sup> staff from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Central Region trained the students on how to identify barriers in their neighborhood that hinder access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities (e.g., unsafe street crossings for pedestrians and lack of healthy food options in stores). With a better understanding of their situation, Mayra and other CX<sup>3</sup> students used "PhotoVoice" to document and communicate these barriers. PhotoVoice entails taking pictures of the issues in the neighborhood environment and using these along with photo captions to bring forth the community "voice" on what they must face on a daily basis and how it impacts them.

Next, the students needed to get the word out to those who could bring about change. They shared findings from the CX<sup>3</sup> Youth Engagement PhotoVoice Project with

community leaders and decision-makers to tell the story of Lincoln Park. To do this, they leveraged broader community forums as a platform, including presenting their PhotoVoice findings at a community workshop on the San Diego Association of Government's Regional Transportation Plan and at a local workshop on creating walkable and livable communities that featured national walkability expert Mark Fenton.

The students' call to action caught the attention of a community representative from City of San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer's office, who requested copies of the photos to send to the appropriate offices in City Hall and invited the CX<sup>3</sup> youth to meet Mayor Faulconer and show him the pictures themselves. These photos have been useful tools to increase awareness of the barriers to a healthy, safe, and thriving Lincoln Park, such as walkability issues in the neighborhood. Further, the photos have sparked discussion among residents about how to work together to identify opportunities for future community improvement projects.

By the summer of 2015, soon after the youth met with Mayor Faulconer, the City installed multiple improvements, including repaving sidewalks and removing dangerous and illegal traffic obtrusions, to make Lincoln Park a safer, more resilient neighborhood, with increased opportunities for walking and biking safely to school.

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

Securing a school champion and recruiting students for the CX<sup>3</sup> project were the biggest challenges presented by this project. Initial partners at the high school were very excited and supportive of the idea, but didn't have the time available to work as school liaisons to ensure its success. HHS Central Region's CX<sup>3</sup> staff persisted and it took several school visits to find a teacher willing to commit himself to be the group's CX<sup>3</sup> champion. Playing an instrumental role, the teacher recruited his students and offered classroom space for the group to meet after school.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

After their successful PhotoVoice project, the Lincoln Park High School CX<sup>3</sup> youth have shifted their focus toward making their school a healthier place to learn. With support from a science teacher and an engineering teacher, the CX<sup>3</sup> youth spent the 2014-2015 school year building and launching "Lincoln's Living Lab," the school's first garden. The students' short-term goal is to maintain the school garden and get Garden to Café certification with San Diego Unified School District so that produce from the garden can go into the school's salad bar. The long-term goal for sustainability is to integrate the garden into the science curriculum and create a greener campus by introducing composting and recycling rainwater for the garden. The students, champion teachers,

school leaders, and HHS Central Region CX<sup>3</sup> staff are all excited about this next phase of their work to create a healthier community in Lincoln Park.

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

### Mission Middle School Empowers Parents in School Health

#### Intervention Summary

Mission Middle School in Escondido Union School District (EUSD) already exemplified a positive and healthy lifestyle environment when school administration first invited community partners to work on student and school wellness. Students, parents, and the school were actively growing and maintaining a school garden, the “A to Z” vegetable menu in the cafeteria, and colorful vegetable artwork posted on campus, among other school-wide efforts. With all of these promising efforts already taking place, Mission Middle School leveraged the work of the North Inland *Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX<sup>3</sup>)* team to build sustainable success. The CX<sup>3</sup> team is a group of engaged community stakeholders that includes residents who have been trained in policy, systems, and environmental change strategies. The team also includes staff from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) North Inland Region.

Local community-based organization Escondido Education COMPACT stepped in as a part of this team to take Mission Middle School’s progress to the next level by bringing tools, resources, and education about additional healthy lifestyle improvements the school could make in order to sustain its momentum. COMPACT is funded to do this work as a part of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency’s (HHS) Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHS receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego’s broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

One of the major strategies Mission Middle School and its NEOP-funded partners used this year to increase school health was parent engagement through Parent Lunch events. The purpose of Parent Lunch events was to encourage parents to eat lunch at school with their kids so that they could better understand the nutritional environments their children were exposed to each day, and how families could prepare healthier meals both in and outside of the school day for their children. COMPACT provided education to encourage healthy eating habits during these Parent Lunch events, and a NEOP-approved healthy recipe was incorporated into the Parent Lunch menu. Additionally, COMPACT worked with school administration on some Smarter Lunchroom Strategies, such as milk placement in the cafeteria to prioritize display of low-fat milk over chocolate milk.

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

At the beginning of these events, the need for education was clear; some parents were bringing food on campus that was high in fat and sugars. EUSD Nutrition Services and COMPACT recognized the need to join forces to not only educate parents, but also provide resources to empower them to make better choices. They agreed that an integral part of their strategy had to include changes to the school food environment. For example, they began placing the cartons of low-fat white milk in front of the cartons of chocolate milk, making the healthy choice the easy choice.

### **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

Incorporating a healthy recipe into the menu for a Parent Lunch highlighted EUSD's Nutrition Services' willingness to serve healthy, culturally appropriate food that students and families were accustomed to eating at home. Plans are in the works to have this new recipe permanently added to the menu and available at more EUSD elementary schools. Additionally, throughout the entire district, Nutrition Services has placed low-fat white milk in the front of the cafeteria milk section in an effort to allow students to be more conscious of their food choices and to encourage them to drink unflavored low-fat milk. In the future, COMPACT will be looking to continue collaboration with the CX<sup>3</sup> team to establish an ongoing nutrition and physical activity program at the school garden.

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

### San Marcos Creates Safe Routes to Three Schools

#### Intervention Summary

An important way to support student health and healthy school environments is by improving walkability and accessibility of the routes children and families use to travel to school. Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a formal strategy for increasing the health and safety of these routes and encouraging more students to walk and bike to school. In 1969, 50 percent of all children walked to school; today, only 15 percent of America's children do so. Successful SRTS programs have helped communities regain some of the active living practices of the past, showing an increase in walking to school by more than 50 percent and in bicycling by more than 25 percent. SRTS not only improves the neighborhood environment to be more conducive to active transportation and living, it also forges partnerships among community stakeholders that may not otherwise work together to make the infrastructure and non-infrastructure improvements that turn SRTS plans into practices. Additionally, recent studies have shown that healthy and fit students make better learners.

To improve opportunities for physical activity in San Marcos, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) collaborated with the City of San Marcos and the San Marcos Unified School District (SMUSD) to improve walkability and bikeability around three low-income schools by developing a SRTS plan. This work is a part of and supported with funding from HHSA's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHSA receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

In late 2015, HHSA contracted with Circulate San Diego (Circulate) to work with the three partners and lead development of the plan. The plan is intended to augment and complement the City's recently-completed Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, adding a focus on high-need schools where there is a need for greater safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists.

To begin plan development, Circulate created a site selection process to select the schools that would be featured in the plan. They met with the District and the City to present their recommendations and gather input on these selections. Circulate also developed an outreach process and hosted several community workshops to engage the public in the SRTS plan, including parents and students. These workshops included presentations in English and Spanish explaining the project, and the importance of walkability to the community. Parents, students, and staff were also engaged in a mapping exercise to identify safety concerns around the schools and in the community. These comments were recorded and utilized in the prioritization process.

On September 25, 2015, the plan was unveiled simultaneously in a walk/bike to school day event at the three SMUSD schools incorporated into the plan: Alvin Dunn Elementary, San Marcos Middle, and Woodland Park Middle. The unveiling also featured a map for each school with suggested safe routes for kids to walk or bike to school. The plan also set the stage for the implementation of suggested non-infrastructure improvements (e.g., increased enforcement, additional crossing guards, and parent/staff SRTS education) as well as future infrastructure improvements (e.g., new sidewalks and signage). These improvements were proposed using professional engineering drawings designed with input from SMUSD and the city's engineering department. The ultimate goal of the plan is two-fold: to create safer routes to school and encourage active transportation. All components of the SRTS plan were designed with the invaluable input from parents, students, and school staff, and the expertise and efforts of the City of San Marcos, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, and local non-profit Circulate San Diego.

With the three SMUSD schools invested in the SRTS plan, partners delivered more than 2500 pocket maps with suggested safe routes to school designed specifically for each school. The maps are very illustrative, and represent ways for students to access each school in the safest way possible using existing infrastructure (sidewalks, stop signs, crosswalks, etc.) and programmatic elements (crossing guards, future park and walk lots, etc.). A 15-minute "walkshed" is shown, illustrating the amount of distance a child can expect to cover in 15 minutes using the existing street network. Each school also received an electronic copy of the map which they can reprint as needed.

The walk/bike to school day event celebrating this progress demonstrated the community's enthusiasm, a promising sight for families that look forward to seeing the

SRTS plan implemented. Even in the early morning heat, it seemed like nearly all of Alvin Dunn Elementary School's 1,200 students took advantage of the opportunity to walk or bike to school.

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

One of the most important steps of the SRTS plan was to bring together representatives from the City of San Marcos' engineering department and SMUSD to identify the obstacles to safe walkability and bikeability around the three selected schools. One of the major challenges these two entities faced was identifying and prioritizing infrastructure improvement recommendations in the plan that aligned with the input of students, parents, and principals from each school. Also, one of the global challenges throughout the planning stage was the very limited work timeline of two months. These challenges were anticipated from the formative stages of the project among stakeholders, and were legitimized as the project began to take shape.

The creation of this stakeholder-driven SRTS plan in such an expedited manner required precise management and excellent communication. Partners were able to problem-solve and coordinate to reduce the logistical challenges associated with gathering input and expertise of many diverse stakeholders. Importantly, placing great value on the input from all collaborators facilitated HHSA's vision of helping to create a legitimate SRTS plan with concrete suggested infrastructure and non-infrastructure improvements. This project was instrumental in nurturing a stronger relationship between SMUSD and the City of San Marcos' engineering department, setting them up for future collaboration on infrastructure improvements and SRTS implementation.

"It's really great that we're working together with the school district to get a complete perspective on the improvements we need to make our routes safer," said Mike Rafael, a Senior Traffic Engineer at the City of San Marcos. "[This collaboration] is long overdue."

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

A plan is only a plan. The key to sustainability is ensuring that the San Marcos SRTS plan gets implemented. Having an official plan that included collaboration with each other, the public health sector, and residents puts the City and SMUSD at an advantage when going after grants to implement elements of the plan. Additionally, crucial to the long-term success of this project are the engineering designs that Healthy Works and Circulate delivered to the city's engineering department. These designs will be an invaluable part of the funding applications and eventual implementation of the suggested improvements laid out in the SRTS plan. Engineering and traffic specialists working with the project team submitted engineering designs for each of the school's "Very-High Priority" improvement recommendations, in collaboration with the city's

engineering department, with the clear and ultimate goal that they will go after the appropriate funding that will make the improvements possible.

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

### The Wellness Champion Program

#### Intervention Summary

Children develop many of their food preferences, eating behaviors, and physical activity habits during preschool years, so addressing obesity prevention in child care centers and preschools is crucial. Poor diet and lack of physical activity are behaviors that can start early and contribute to a lifetime of health risks. In 2012, the American Red Cross Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program estimated 21.1% of 3-year old children and 20.4% of 4-year old children in the San Diego County WIC program were considered obese (a BMI greater than the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile). When these trends continue unchecked, obesity can progress with age and lead to other health complications.

To address the issue of childhood obesity, the YMCA Childcare Resource Service (YMCA-CRS) is working with family child care homes and preschool centers to improve the quality of nutrition and physical activity that children receive during the day at the sites. According to the 2011 U.S. Census, over 60% of children under the age of 5 spent time in child care on a weekly basis, many over 35 hours per week. For many children, the majority of meals and physical activity opportunities occurs in the child care setting, making it the ideal environment to shape healthy eating and active living habits.

Yet state licensing policies, which regulate both family child care homes and preschool centers, have minimal requirements concerning nutrition and physical activity. Also, very few child care and preschool providers have adopted their own policies addressing childhood obesity. In addition, while many family child care providers prioritize the wellness of the children they serve, they may not have the information or resources needed to ensure they are providing a healthy nutrition and physical activity

environment. Furthermore, preschool centers rarely incorporate obesity prevention programming into their educational practices.

To address this need, the YMCA-CRS developed a new Wellness Champion Program that helps child care providers improve the nutrition and physical activity environments in child care settings, and provides incentives and support for those providers that are able to meet all program criteria.

The YMCA-CRS' Wellness Champion Program is a part of and supported with funding from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHS) Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) Program. HHS receives a NEOP grant from the United States Department of Agriculture by way of the California Department of Public Health. NEOP is a program of Healthy Works, which is part of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego's broader vision for healthy, safe, and thriving communities.

### **Becoming a Wellness Champion**

To receive Wellness Champion designation, child care providers are required to complete the following activities:

1. Attend one nutritional and physical activity training workshop.
2. Uphold best practices in nutrition and physical activity, scoring at least 80% on the wellness assessment tool.
3. Make changes to reach Wellness Champion designation, assisted by on-site technical assistance from a YMCA-CRS health educator.

As of September 2015, 23 eligible providers have attended a Wellness Champion Program nutritional and physical activity workshop to begin their journey toward designation. Offered on a monthly basis over the summer, the workshops were presented in both English and Spanish to ensure maximum accessibility by diverse providers.

At the start of the program, providers completed the Creating Healthy Opportunities in Child Care Environments (CHOICES) assessment, a self-administered 35-item questionnaire, to get a baseline measure of their practices in nutrition, physical activity, and staff and parent training. To achieve Wellness Champion designation, providers must be meeting a minimum of 80% of the best practices listed in the questionnaire. The average pre-test score for the child care providers who have completed the program was 70%. By the end of the program (about three months), with an average score of 90%, providers had improved and were more prepared for designation.

YMCA-CRS staff employed a health educator to provide participating child care providers with technical assistance as they worked to improve the nutrition and physical

activity environment at their sites. The on-site technical assistance was adapted to meet the unique needs of each participating provider. During some technical assistance visits, the health educator helped providers conduct taste tests at their center to introduce children to healthier foods. Others received coaching on how to lead structured physical activity using the SPARK curriculum. At least one of the on-site technical assistance visits for all providers involved the development of a wellness policy for the family child care or preschool center.



One provider who completed the Wellness Champion Program over the summer is already seeing the benefits at her child care site.

“My husband and I are so happy we participated in the Wellness Champion Program. We really enjoyed the workshop. We learned so much! It was interactive and kept us both engaged the entire time. We have used the ideas that we learned at the workshop with the children at our child care. We made the healthy fruit wraps and the children absolutely loved them – even the picky eaters! We have also enjoyed the visits. The

health educators have been great at coaching us on how to be healthier at my child care. They also helped me learn how to get my picky eaters to eat their fruits and vegetables. Even the parents have noticed improvement in their children's eating. For us, it's good to know there is someone out there for support."

Beyond creating a healthier environment for the children they serve, this Wellness Champion Program provides an opportunity to highlight healthy businesses, and there is a business incentive for child care providers that become designated. Graduates of the program are highlighted as Wellness Champions in the YCMA-CRS Resource and Referral line, so that when parents call the line searching for quality child care, they are asked if they would like referrals to providers "that serve healthy snacks and offer structured physical activity."

An additional incentive for Wellness Champion providers includes having initiation fees waived for providers who are interested in joining any YMCA gym in San Diego County (a \$100 value). This benefit encourages child care providers to lead a healthy lifestyle themselves, and become wellness role models to the children and families they serve.

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

Initial outreach for the Wellness Champion Program took place via e-mail, flyers, and word of mouth, reaching over 2,500 providers. An overwhelming number of child care providers expressed interest in participating in the program. Due to limited space, not all providers were able to join the program initially. However, a waitlist was created and some providers are waiting a few months to get started. To maintain providers' interest, YMCA-CRS created a Wellness Champion newsletter that includes SNAP-Ed approved resources such as healthy recipes and ideas for structured physical activity.

## **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

The Wellness Champion designation lasts for one year. After the first year, graduates are eligible to renew their Wellness Champion status upon paying a fee and agreeing to a visit from a health educator to reassess their wellness practices. The YMCA-CRS also plans to create tools that support Wellness Champions and families beyond their involvement in the program, including videos, web-based training, and ongoing communication through the newsletter.

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