

Policy, Systems and Environmental Success Stories for the County of San Diego's 2014 Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant

Table of Contents

	Program Area	Success Story Title
1	African American Faith-Based Channel; implementing partner: subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>"Healthier Me Initiative"</i>
2	Latino Faith-Based Channel; implementing partner: subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>Gracia y Paz Covenant Church Links Spiritual and Physical Health through Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy</i>
3	Muslim Faith-Based Channel; implementing partner: subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>Mothers in Action for Healthy Kids</i>
4	Worksite Channel; implementing partner: subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>Better-for-you Vending Options Available for Goodwill Industries Employees</i>
5	School Channel; implementing partner: subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>How San Diego Is Growing Harvest of the Month Beyond the School Cafeteria</i>
6	Retail Channel; implementing partner: Subcontractor UCSD Division of Community Health	<i>Healthy Cocina Initiative: Market Offers Oasis for Hungry Residents in Food Desert</i>
7	Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention (CX³) Linda Vista Neighborhood in San Diego; implementing partner: Bayside Community Clinic	<i>Linda Placita: How Eight Parking Spaces Were Transformed Into a Community Plaza</i>
8	CX³ Mission Park Neighborhood in Escondido; implementing partner: Escondido Education COMPACT	<i>CX3 Youth Work Hard to Give Life to Community Garden Idea</i>
9	CX³ Old Town Neighborhood in National City Neighborhood	<i>Safe Routes to Healthy Places</i>





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

Healthier Me Initiative

Intervention Summary

For most members of the community, churches are trusted environments for fellowship with others who share similar belief systems. This is true of African Americans who attend church. Many African Americans suffer from type 2 diabetes, obesity and other chronic illnesses. It is customary for some churches to serve baked goods and high-fat, sugary comfort foods at congregation events. However, this type of environment has contributed to overweight and obese congregants. For many churches, resources are few and far between. However, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* at UC San Diego Center for Community Health is working to provide some of these resources. With funding from the California Department of Public Health through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works Initiative under *Live Well San Diego*, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has partnered with City of Hope Church to create a model to break the cycle of poor food choices offered in faith-based settings. The goal of the “Healthier Me Initiative” is to establish a policy that is sustainable in order to support healthy changes for the congregation members. After adopting a Healthy Food Policy, City of Hope Church now offers healthier alternatives after worship services and church events. Before implementing the Healthy Food Policy, City of Hope Church collaborated with the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* in hosting the “Healthier Me Initiative” launch. The purpose of this event was to introduce the new Healthy Food Policy to City of Hope Church members. During the “Healthier Me Initiative” launch, participants learned how to substitute unhealthy ingredients, and taste-tested wholesome and nutritious foods, gaining more knowledge about ways to serve healthier items. These foods are low in sodium, sugar and fat, and are high in

fiber. The Healthy Food Policy will be adopted for meetings, potluck events and community events, including workshops and health fairs.



Launch of Healthier Me Initiative

Through a strong partnership with City of Hope Church and the *Faith-Based Wellness Program*, support was garnered from other community-based organizations. At the “Healthier Me Initiative” launch, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* provided physical activity sessions and obesity prevention education. Partnering organizations provided preventative and screening services, and weigh-ins. Participants also brought healthier lunch options. In addition, a nutrition education class was offered to provide tips on limiting unhealthy foods served to the congregation. Lakeysha Sowunmi, Program Manager for the *Faith-Based Wellness Program*, and Dr. Suzanne Afflalo, City of Hope Church’s liaison, had a vision to bring other like-minded community-based organizations together to promote healthy food alternatives at the church. The City of Hope Wellness Team also created a “Healthier Me Initiative” logo to memorialize the “Healthier Me Initiative.” The logo was used on the flyer and nutrition education material during the launch of the “Healthier Me Initiative.”

Healthy Food Policy Implementation

The church is dedicated to improving the health of their church members. For example, instead of serving unhealthy snacks and sugary beverages after worship services, City of Hope Church promises to ensure healthier options are available. City of Hope Church has taken the first step to making a lasting impact on the types of food served at church functions. The church’s plan of action outlined in the Healthy Food Policy shows the commitment of the church’s leadership to stand against unhealthy behaviors. The Pastor, who is an ex-San Diego Chargers football player, is excited and fully supportive of the change.

Keeping Meaningful Traditions

Event participants expressed the need to keep and celebrate traditions. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* provided participants with the “Soulful Cookbook” to offer alternatives to those treasured cooking traditions. For the “Healthier Me Initiative” launch, the cooking ministry provided low-calorie meals with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and water.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* faced barriers. Some participants were unfamiliar with healthier versions of the foods they are accustomed to eating. This caused some resistance when it came to adopting the Healthy Food Policy. To overcome that barrier, the congregants will need extra time to adjust to the changes. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* has also distributed the “Soulful Recipe” cookbook to assist with this challenge. Another barrier faced was that some ministries within the church did not understand the details of the Healthy Food Policy. The church will continue to work with all church staff and the congregation in making small changes in diet, which will lead to the big changes towards a healthier lifestyle. Dr. Suzanne Afflalo of City of Hope Church said, “They have already started to make changes in the foods they are serving at several of their latest events - more fruits and raw veggies, less fried foods and pastries, more water and fewer sodas.” Dr. Afflalo plans to educate and inform the other ministries about the details of the Healthy Food Policy through email messages and at church services. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* plans to provide further assistance by connecting City of Hope Church to local food banks to ensure healthy food is accessible for church events and functions.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The “Healthier Me Initiative” has been successful because of the support of the Pastor, church leaders and the congregants. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* and City of Hope Church look forward to recruiting more churches interested in incorporating a Healthy Food Policy. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* is also seeking opportunities to have a positive influence in the health of surrounding communities.



Future Goals

Short-term goals include:

- Generate community partnerships with the following entities:
 - Local food banks for access to fresh produce
 - Health professionals to conduct medical screenings
 - Local parks and recreational centers with joint-use agreements
- Promote wellness during sermons
- Conduct health-related events to encourage motivation for Healthy Food Policy adaptation

Long-term goals include:

- Develop a statewide media campaign encouraging churches across the state to follow this model
- Recruit church members who are counselors, social workers, nurses, community health professionals, and those who are well-known and respected in the church to support policy implementation and provide health related services
- Conduct evaluations of implemented Healthy Food policies

- Encourage church leadership to attend conferences to demonstrate the need for healthy policies within faith-based settings

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

Gracia y Paz Covenant Church Links Spiritual and Physical Health through Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy

Intervention Summary

Research shows Latinos of all ages have the highest rates of obesity, excess weight and type 2 diabetes compared with other ethnicities living in California. It is clear that investing time and resources to prevent these health problems is critical. Faith-based organization leaders in San Diego County's underserved Latino communities are responding by incorporating health and wellness interventions, including policy, systems and environmental (PSE) changes, to support healthy eating and drinking within their places of worship. These leaders have already established trust and respect in their communities, and they recognize improving health is not only a benefit to their congregation members, but also a benefit to the surrounding community. By implementing policy and systems changes in their organizations, they are able to help their congregants make healthier choices the easier choice.

Gracia y Paz Covenant Church in the City of Chula Vista has more than 80 dedicated congregation members. While the main focus and mission at Gracia y Paz is worship, the church's leadership also firmly believes in providing its members with opportunities to take care of both their spiritual and physical health, tying healthy practices into their faith.

Church and community events typically consist of foods high in fat, sugar and calories, with little nutritional value; this is no longer true at Gracia y Paz Covenant Church. Gracia Y Paz worked with the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* at UC San Diego Center

for Community Health, with funding from the California Department of Public Health through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works Initiative under *Live Well San Diego. Through the Faith-Based Wellness Program*, Gracia y Paz leaders and congregation members decided to develop and establish a Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy for all church activities and events. This policy ensures its members have healthy food and beverage options available and accessible. This written policy clearly defines “healthy” beverage and food guidelines, which helps facilitate consistent communication amongst church staff and volunteers. The policy states that whenever foods are served at church events and activities fruit and vegetables will be included, fried foods will not be served, and drinks will be limited to water, 100% juice or low-fat milk. These healthy alternatives encourage a healthier lifestyle by providing healthier options at celebrations, events and other activities where food and drinks are served.

An Event Celebrating Change

On September 28, 2014, Pastor Jorge Garcia of Gracia y Paz prepared a special sermon to emphasize Jesus’ teachings in regards to physical health and the importance of being “good administrators of the body.” This sermon coincided with Latino Health Awareness Month, and was a way to bring awareness to, promote, and celebrate the newly established Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy. The grand finale for the sermon was the official reading and signing of the Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy. All congregation members at the service witnessed the formal signing and adoption of this policy by Pastor Jorge. The Pastor then invited everyone in attendance to come forward and sign the policy as a formal commitment they would adopt this policy in their individual lives as well.

Immediately following the service, all members were invited to attend a healthy *fiesta* at the church, where children, families and seniors were treated to healthy Latino recipes from the *Champions for Change* “El Sabor de Mi Cocina” cookbook. These recipes were prepared by church members and volunteers, and all recipe selections were made taking the new policy into consideration. Some of the highlighted recipes included: *ensalada de mango y frijol negro*, *picadillo de pollo*, *arroz mexicano con verduras*, and *sofrito de elote y calabaza*. All volunteers who prepared a recipe received acknowledgment for their efforts. **For the first time during a church event, no sugary drinks were served, only water.**

A local Latino radio station – *Radio Latina* – was present and helped liven up the event with music and physical activity games for children and their parents. *Radio Latina* helped emphasize the importance of proper nutrition and physical activity through interactive games, quizzes, on-air opportunities for children and even a relay race. Every family went home with a *Champions for Change* “goodie bag” filled with their very own cookbook to replicate at home the recipes they ate at the event. The goodie bag

also included recipe cards, health information, a notepad for grocery shopping and more. Most importantly, everyone in attendance went home motivated to incorporate these healthy changes into their lives and the lives of those around them.

Laying the Groundwork

In order to make policy, systems and environmental changes in faith-based organizations, it is important to gain the church leader's trust and support. Once church leaders empower congregants through these PSE changes, the leadership and the congregants find the healthy choice is the easiest choice.

Leading up to the establishment of Gracia y Paz Covenant Church's Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* developed and conducted a nutrition education series. There were 12 different nutrition lessons, including lessons on MyPlate basics, healthy beverage choices, eating right when money is tight, portion control and how to read nutrition fact labels, among others.

In order to sustain this policy change at Gracia y Paz, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* will continue working with Pastor Jorge and his wife, Perla, to ensure all church staff and volunteers are aware of and understand the policy. Additionally, the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* will continue to provide technical assistance as it relates to the implementation of this policy, or any other health and wellness-related effort undertaken at Gracia y Paz Covenant Church.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

One of the most difficult aspects of incorporating health and wellness efforts at various faith-based partner sites continues to be the fact that the leadership and administration at places of worship find themselves working with limited staff, and at times, very limited resources to accomplish their missions. This dilemma leaves the leadership with little availability and energy to develop partnerships with the *Faith-Based Wellness Program*. This also makes it difficult for the *Faith-Based Wellness Program* staff to communicate with them in a timely and effective manner.

Pastor Jorge of Gracia y Paz Covenant Church was enthusiastic, involved and extremely supportive throughout the process that led to the establishment of the Healthy Eating and Healthy Drinking Policy. However, "*getting things done*" in the faith-based setting when faced with formidable policy-change goals has turned out to be a lengthy and time-consuming process.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Short-term goals include:

- Provide technical assistance as it relates to the implementation of the healthy eating and healthy drinking policy.
- Increase awareness of the newly adopted policy by displaying it on Gracia y Paz Covenant Church's website, kitchen and volunteer areas.
- Continue to conduct increasingly innovative nutrition education lessons and activities.
- Establish a stronger partnership and connection with the on-site community garden and the on-site preschool.

Long-term goals include:

- Create an internal, member-driven and operated "Health and Wellness Ministry."
- Identify, recruit and train a group of church women using the *Champions for Change's* Champion Mom model and curriculum.
- Obtain a *Live Well San Diego* designation from the County of San Diego as a *Live Well San Diego* Church.

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

Mothers in Action for Healthier Kids

Intervention Summary

Research shows rates of obese and overweight children in California are greater than the national averages. Additionally, inequalities occur within certain ethnic and socioeconomic communities. In 2011, nearly half (46.0 percent) of California's low-income children were classified as overweight or obese, with over a quarter of children classified as obese (25.2 percent). The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (2008), from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recommends children engage in 60 minutes or more of physical activity daily. However, less than two-thirds (63.7 percent) of California's low-income children reported physical activity at the recommended levels. In addition, the majority of the participating schools are located in areas with families <185% Federal Poverty Line. Often these families are attending schools that scored low in national fitness testing. Parents of children in the East African communities are usually less likely to be involved in schools or neighborhood wellness committees. These parents and their children are often in need of health awareness information. If parents are informed, they will be more equipped to provide healthy choices for their families and encourage for these choices throughout their communities, including those schools where their children attend. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* at UC San Diego Center for Community Health coordinated a six-week leadership series of classes called the *Parent in Action Program*, with funding from the California Department of Public Health through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works Initiative under *Live Well San Diego*. The program is designed to empower parents to enact changes in schools and

throughout the neighborhoods where they live. The *Faith-Based Wellness Program* coordinated collective efforts with California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition), and the United Women of East Africa Support Team, a nonprofit with a mission to be the pipeline of culturally competent health services, education, and advocacy for the improvement of East African women and their families' health and well being.

The six-week leadership *Parent in Action Program* training sessions were very successful. Fifteen parents, in this case all mothers, at 13 San Diego County schools participated in the *Parent in Action Program*. The sessions were facilitated by a Project LEAN educator who is an expert in school wellness policy efforts. Additionally, United Women of East Africa Support Team supported the training by providing a safe place to meet at their office, as well as childcare, translation services, and food for the six-week sessions. This alleviated traditional barriers which impede these parents from attending educational sessions.



Prior to the six-week series, participants completed a questionnaire about wellness, physical activity, and knowledge of school policies. The results showed one of every 11

mothers engaged in volunteer activity at their child's school, 27 percent did not know how to measure the amount of sugar in a beverage, and 73 percent were unsure about their ability to measure. After the intervention, nine out of every 10 parents were engaged in volunteer activity, and most were participating in multiple activities in more than one topic area at school. In addition, 90 percent of participants could now confidently measure the amount of sugar in a beverage, and almost 90 percent of participants agreed the training helped them feel more comfortable promoting healthier foods and beverages, and more physical activity at school. Parents from the following schools participated in the training:

- *Horace Mann Middle School*
- *Normal Heights Elementary School*
- *Health Sciences High & Middle Charter School*
- *Helix Charter High School*
- *Will C. Crawford Senior High School*
- *The Preuss School*
- *Creative Performing and Media Arts*
- *Vista Grande Elementary School*
- *Scripps Ranch High School*
- *Carver Elementary School*
- *Hamilton Elementary School*
- *Iftin Charter School*
- *Harriet Tubman Village Charter School*

Powerful testimonial from a parent participant:

"After completing the Parent Leadership Sessions, I am not only a parent, but I became an engaged parent who has a voice and contributes to the changes in my children's school and my neighborhood." **Laila Ali, June 2014**

Quote from California Project LEAN

"Going through the Parents in Action process with the East African parents gave me real insight into how much these parents care about healthy schools and how they would like to be more involved in this issue. By bringing this group together to inform them about school wellness policies, physical activity and nutrition, they are now better-equipped to work collaboratively with their schools and community partners such as the UC San Diego Center for Community Health to make improvements that will contribute to their children's health and academic success." **Deirdre Kleske, September 2014**

Wellness opportunities in schools and throughout the community

Areas of concern were raised by mothers regarding the accessibility and condition of suitable areas for their children to participate in physical activity at both in school and in community settings. Further, they would like safer playgrounds, increased access to fresh drinking water at school, healthier school celebrations/parties, safer routes to schools, and parks which are smoke-free. Moreover, many parents report there is a need to beautify their neighborhoods and make them more appropriate and friendlier for physical activity. These changes will allow families to enjoy safer routes for their children to walk or bike to school.

After the sessions were completed, participants decided to form an advisory wellness committee representing the participating schools. The committee members have had several meetings since forming; a focus has been to increase awareness of factors and resources contributing to lack of physical activity opportunities for Muslim girls. The committee has a mission to encourage development of a culturally competent physical activity policy for Muslim girls, and to implement systematic policies.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Due to their modesty in clothing, Muslim girls have difficulties participating in standard physical activity. The local physical activity programs offered in schools and recreation centers do not offer physical activities in which Muslim girls feel comfortable participating. However, through the dedicated wellness committee members and partners willing to support these efforts, Muslim girls will have access to inclusive physical activity in the near future. The committee envisions opportunities for Muslim girls to have culturally-sensitive physical activities implemented in schools and recreation centers.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Short-term goals:

- Continue to recruit more committee members from faith-based sectors and other community leaders to support physical activity policies that are inclusive of Muslim girls.

- Identify schools and recreation centers, and share the importance of cultural competence in physical activity arenas.
- Brainstorm planning ideas and strategic approaches to include school-aged Muslim girls in the wellness committee.
- Organize and provide cultural competency training to the sites interested in adopting, implementing and offering changes.
- Continue to promote and raise awareness about the importance of physical activity for all children.
- Continue meeting with Iftin Charter School to implement culturally competent physical activity policy for Muslim girls.

Long-term goals include:

- Work with local schools and recreation facilities to offer a culturally competent physical activity program. Continue to implement policy, systems and environmental changes, and evaluate the process in order to understand how progress is being made.
- Develop a media plan, and share the progress and success of the implementation with other sites to ultimately encourage adoption and successful implementation of these policies at both school and recreation sites.

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

***Better-for-you* Vending Options Available for Goodwill Industries Employees**

Intervention Summary

More and more research is showing how poor health is bad for business. According to Public Health Institute, two-thirds of our workforce is overweight or obese and 50% of company profits goes towards health care costs, so investing in healthy environments pays at work. Trends show that employees are snacking more on nutrient dense foods lower in calories, sugar, sodium, and fat. Leading vending companies are responding by improving the health profile and nutritional labeling of their snacks and beverages. By making healthy items affordable and accessible in vending machines, research has shown that making the healthier option the default can lead to healthier purchasing choices.

Goodwill Industries of San Diego County has more than 50 locations throughout San Diego County, employing more than 1300 residents. Goodwill Industries firmly believes in providing its employees with access to healthy options while at work as part of its mission to enhance dignity and quality of life by helping people reach their full potential through education, skills training, and the power of work.

Goodwill Industries established an employee wellness program, *Good Willpower*, in 2013. This program was supported by the *Worksite Wellness Program* at UC San Diego Center for Community Health, with funding from the California Department of Public Health through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works Initiative under *Live Well San Diego*. *Good Willpower* has become a thriving program which also created a wellness committee to support various employee-driven initiatives.

With the support of the *Worksite Wellness Program*, Goodwill's Wellness Committee assessed their lack of current healthy snack and beverage vending options; at the start, the percentage of healthy vending options ranged from only 5 percent to 10 percent. Collectively, the Committee decided to pursue an upgrade to its vending contracts to provide employees with a minimum of 50 percent healthy snack and beverage options. Vending machines are located at eight sites in a variety of locations, including retail and donation centers, employment centers, destruction sites, and corporate offices. In partnership with its current vending company, Canteen Vendors, one of the nation's largest and longest running vending companies, Goodwill was able to offer healthy vending alternatives that taste great and support a healthful lifestyle.

Canteen Vendors offers a healthy vending program, "Choice Plus," to improve the well-being of employees with options that enhance the existing Goodwill Power Wellness Program. Canteen's Choice Plus *Better-for-you Options* were designed by a team of registered dietitians and culinary experts. The options include granola, fruit bars, dried fruit mixes, trail mixes, low-fat and/or baked chips and crackers, and more. Beverage options include unsweetened flavored and unflavored waters, tea, coffee, low-fat dairy milk, among others. Choice Plus items' nutritional criteria reflect the latest research, legislation, and client standards around healthy snack and beverage options. These healthy vending alternatives provide a balanced approach to vending by linking wellness to encourage healthier lifestyle choices.

With the support of the *Worksite Wellness Program*, Goodwill Industries employed a comprehensive approach to its Choice Plus vending program. First, the Wellness Committee designated one Wellness Committee member to champion this program. Next, key stakeholders were engaged in the process, including administrators, fiscal leads, upper management, and current vending companies. Simultaneously, Canteen Vendors conducted an evaluation of its current vending sale trends to identify how Canteen's addition of healthy options can fit with Goodwill's wellness goals and initiatives. Onsite managers, employees, human resource staff, and wellness committee members provided input and feedback on these proposed changes in order to design a program to fit the needs of their employees.

Additionally, prior to the launch of the Choice Plus vending program, the *Worksite Wellness Program* developed a communication and marketing plan to market these changes. Employees were informed of the Choice Plus nutritional criteria and snack options through the use of social marketing strategies, including e-blasts, vending machine posters, employee newsletter articles, wellness board postings, employee website features, and supervisor announcements to promote healthy behavior change. The *Worksite Wellness Program* offered nutrition education sessions to employees, including lessons on nutrition fact label reading, healthy snack and beverage choices, and MyPlate basics, to facilitate employees making informed choices.

In order to promote the Choice Plus options, these products were clearly labeled within the vending machine and their nutritional breakdown is outlined. Also, to support the purchasing of healthier choices, product placement strategies were utilized by putting healthier snack and beverage options at eye level and putting less healthy options near the bottom of the vending machine.

In order to sustain these environmental changes, the *Worksite Wellness Program* developed a Healthy Vending Policy with the Goodwill Wellness Committee to be included in their Policies and Procedures Handbook. This written policy clearly defines “healthy” beverage and food standards, and facilitates consistent communication of organizational goals to vendors and enables effective monitoring and evaluation. The contractual change between Canteen Vendors continues to be maintained and evaluated by Goodwill. Evaluation measures developed by the *Worksite Wellness Program* continue to be collected to assess employee receptivity and inform changes to allow for improvements. The success of this effort has been demonstrated through tracking quarterly sales data, employee surveys, and wellness committee feedback.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The most challenging aspect of establishing and maintaining healthy vending standards at Goodwill Industries was negotiating and modifying the existing vending contracts. Canteen Vendors was supportive throughout the process of changing the vending options. However, the nature of the process of modifying contracts is lengthy and time-consuming and requires commitment and support of the organization to accomplish the changes. There were issues with negotiating the higher percentage of healthy food and beverage items compared to the percentage of unhealthy items. The final decision was to phase in the percentage of healthier options over a designated time period. This has been successful in allowing for a slow introduction to the new products into the machines and allowing for modifications to be made as needed.

Another area that posed special challenges was ensuring that the agreed upon percentage of healthy items was being maintained within the vending machines at the designated locations. The solution was to conduct regular vending machine checks by site managers, wellness committee members, and other employees. These changes were communicated to the wellness committee lead, who then reports any discrepancies to Canteen Vendors.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

To ensure continued success of this effort, the Goodwill wellness committee and NEOPB *Worksite Wellness Program* established short- and long-term goals to define ongoing focus areas.

The short-term goals for the coming year include:

- Assist Goodwill to implement competitive pricing strategies to provide healthier items at a reduced cost and unhealthy items at an increased cost;
- Update and maintain the Healthy Vending Policy within Goodwill Industries Policy and Procedures Handbook;
- Continue to implement product placement strategies to support healthier choices;
- Continue to track evaluation data and feedback from employees and employer and present findings to the Goodwill Wellness Committee and upper management on a quarterly basis;

- Continue to identify products that are not selling well through sales data reports and replace them with alternative healthy options; and
- Continue to ensure the vending contract compliance through the use of regular maintenance vending machine checks.

The long-term goals include:

- Increase the percentage of healthy snack and beverage options in the vending machines to 100%;
- Expand the vending program and machine allocation to more Goodwill Industries sites throughout the county; and
- Develop a case study on the process and success of the vending program to inform replication of the intervention in other worksites.

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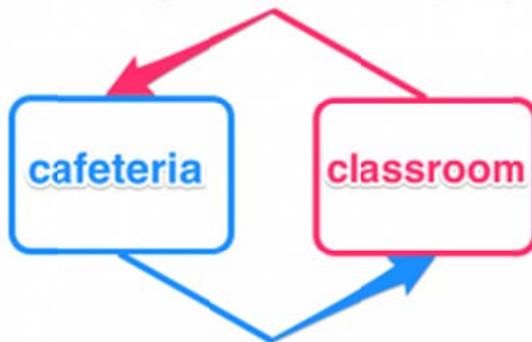
How San Diego Is Growing Harvest of the Month Beyond the School Cafeteria

Intervention Summary

Harvest of the Month (HOTM) is one of the most well-known and utilized strategies in the Farm to School Movement. San Diego is working closely with school and farmer stakeholders to deepen the impact of the program with an exciting pilot project.

Harvest of the Month (HOTM) Programs Strengthen the Cafeteria-Classroom Connection

classroom learning increases school lunch participation



healthy school food environment aids learning

It isn't often there is a true connection between the cafeteria and the classroom. However, the *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* pilot program in San Diego County strives to do just that. Through connecting what students learn in the classroom to what they are eating in the cafeteria, that much needed connection is formed.

The *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* pilot program in San Diego County was facilitated by the *School Wellness Program* with the UC San Diego Center for Community Health, made possible by funding through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works initiative under *Live Well San Diego*.

The pilot for the program took place at three schools in San Diego County: Foothill Oak Elementary in the Vista Unified School District, and Balboa and Audubon Elementary in the San Diego Unified School District.

Bringing Local Produce into the Classroom and to the Cafeteria: A Link Is Born



Each school district already featured locally grown produce on their salad bars, but the school staff was excited to develop an innovative method to bring the produce directly into the K-5 classrooms for their students. In San Diego Unified, the *Harvest of the Month* produce item was packed into the Breakfast in the Classroom bags on the first Wednesday of the month for delivery to each classroom, while in Vista the onsite food service staff bagged the *Harvest of the Month* produce based on class size to be picked up in the cafeteria by the teachers or student representative on the first Thursday of each month.

Students in grades K-5 participated in *Harvest of the Month* taste tests in their classrooms at the beginning of each month. Before each taste test, students recite a pledge to their health, and commit to trying the new fruit or vegetable. Teachers at Audubon Elementary mentioned the taste tests supported a sense of community within their classrooms as students would encourage each other to try the new fruit or vegetable each month. Each taste test was accompanied with a workbook lesson aligned with standards promoting healthy lifestyle habits, such as eating healthy, active living, reduced consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, and reading food labels, just to name a few.



Teachers were also given other supplemental materials to accompany the lessons. These materials include but are not limited to the *Harvest of the Month* newsletter, with fun facts, information and activities surrounding the *Harvest of the Month* produce items, and Get Fit activities to get the students moving in their classrooms.

San Diego Unified developed farmer videos to take students on a virtual field trip to meet the farmer and see the origins of the produce they tasted.

Laurie Bergener, a third grade teacher from Balboa Elementary, states “the kids love meeting the farmer and learning where the produce they are tasting was grown!” The

Harvest of the Month item was then featured on the salad bar once a week for the rest of the month, offering students the opportunity to eat more of the locally grown produce they had tasted in their classroom.

Let's Hear it for Radishes!

In March 2014, students tasted Easter Egg Radishes and enjoyed the radishes so much, the radishes disappeared from the salad bar before the fourth and fifth graders got to lunch.



When asked how the *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* program changed the atmosphere in the lunchroom for food service staff, Foothill Oak food service lead Dania Velarde said it was positive.

"Kids are going to the salad bar more, and there is less pressure on food service staff," Velarde said. "They don't have to stand over the students and persuade them to take fruit or vegetables. They are more

self-inclined to do so. It's already being sold to them in the classroom."

Positive Feedback

Each month teachers provide feedback on the *Harvest of the Month* activities they completed with their classes and many participated in a focus group at the end to provide feedback about the program.

In their feedback, teachers said they enjoyed teaching students where their food came from, and what it looked like in its whole form - not from a can or cut up in pieces. Teachers said the program created awareness around students eating healthier, and becoming advocates for certain choices when parents go shopping. They also said they felt a stronger connection with food staff. Some teachers even utilized parent volunteers to help with the taste tests.

"The experience is great because almost my entire class tried it, and they now know more about local farms," said a teacher at Balboa Elementary. "It's exciting for all of us to try the new harvest of the month."

School principals were also pleased with results.

"My students benefitted from the *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* program by learning that they have more choices," said Erin English, school principal at Foothill Oak Elementary. "They can try a new produce item at school and then tell their parents about it. It broadens their understanding of the food choices available to them."

The *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* program also earned media attention, and was featured on Cox Channel 4's Salute to Education, highlighting Audubon Elementary in San Diego Unified. The video describing the process of how the produce gets from the farm to the cafeteria to the classroom can be seen on YouTube at [this link](#).

The *School Wellness Program* is looking forward to continuing the *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* program at these three schools while expanding the program to other interested schools and school districts in San Diego County.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

To adjust to San Diego Unified's *Harvest of the Month* schedule, which is different from the Southern California calendar and workbooks, the order of the lessons in the workbooks were switched so that the featured produce items matched up with the lessons. Going forward, the approved lessons will be printed as worksheets to align with their internal *Harvest of the Month* calendar.

Another challenge was the amount of time given to train teachers. Many principals were able to provide 20 minutes during a staff meeting, but after conducting focus groups, teachers recommended the trainings be increased in length to include a demonstration of a taste test. This year as the *School Wellness Program* recruits new schools and conducts teacher trainings a focus on the importance of having hour-long trainings in order to set teachers up for success will be implemented.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Short-term goals include: Expand *Harvest of the Month* efforts to more school districts and schools. Districts that are just starting to procure local produce and feature it in the classroom will roll out the first phase of *Harvest of the Month* with marketing materials to promote the local seasonal produce in the cafeteria. Expand the classroom nutrition education component to three new elementary schools that are already procuring local produce and serving it in the cafeteria. Begin to engage parents in the *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* program.

Long-term goals include: Create a sustainable program that will connect the classroom to the cafeteria and can be modeled in school districts of different sizes. Schools will create a system change to bring the *Harvest of the Month* produce item into

the classrooms once a month for taste tests. Food service staff will incorporate a new process into their workday to accommodate and support the monthly taste tests. Incorporate the classroom taste tests and nutrition education component at more elementary schools in participating districts. Ensure each school participating in *Harvest of the Month in the Classroom* has a strong parent engagement component to the program.

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

Healthy Cocina Initiative: Market Offers Oasis for Hungry Residents in Food Desert

Intervention Summary

Quality food choices are limited in San Diego County's City Heights neighborhood. The recent closure of the area's Albertson's only further intensified this dilemma. Aside from the lack of options, affordability is also a concern. When compared to the cheap cost of processed, high caloric meals available at the many fast food establishments within the 92105 zip code, healthy food may not be on the radar for most residents.

The *Healthy Cocina Initiative* pilot has helped make the healthy choice the easy choice at Supermercado Murphy's Market. The pilot project focuses on serving prepared meals that meet USDA dietary guidelines at a low cost, thus benefiting both the consumers' – as well as the store's – bottom line.

The program was developed and is led by the *Retail Program* at UC San Diego Center for Community Health, with funding from the California Department of Public Health through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its Healthy Works Initiative under *Live Well San Diego*. The *Retail Program* made a commitment to the community by partnering with residents, local high school students, and the market's employees to select meal offerings for the program. The project also integrates the San Diego's *Harvest of the Month* in the featured items for its three month duration. Each of the meals is available to shoppers at a reduced price of \$3.97 and the market's employees for \$2.97. The entrée includes a choice of two sides, selected from rice, pinto beans, or pico de gallo fruit salad options.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Much of the success of the program relies on the support of Supermercado Murphy's ownership and management. Sammy, Supermercado Murphy's store manager, understands the importance of promoting fresh and healthy options, especially within his at-risk community. He has been very supportive of the *Healthy Cocina Initiative* by encouraging his employees to make healthful eating decisions.

Sammy has agreed to continue the pilot program through Winter 2014, and maintains an ongoing dialogue with the project coordinators to guarantee its continued success. He is also open to a similar approach at the culmination of the pilot to ensure that his customers and employees can continue to afford to make the healthy choice.

"I want to change their minds and encourage a healthier diet," he emphasized during an interview.

After a successful kick-off event, which included national media coverage and four months of the pilot, the store manager, owner and employees are currently in the process of planning a second round of the pilot program. It will target greater participation from employees and a new approach to programming from the *Retail Program* based on lessons learned during the first round. The long-term goal for the program is to develop a guide which other retail sites can implement in the prepared food section of their stores.

Although shoppers and employees appreciated a less expensive and healthier option, many also expressed interest in other types of healthy foods beyond the project's culturally- specific recipe offerings.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Short-term goals, as determined by *Retail Program* staff and Supermercado employees, include:

- Introduce a dietician to the *cocina* to help create healthy meals;
- Collaborate with the *Worksite Wellness* team to develop an employee nutrition education workshop series;
- Create a recognition program to encourage participation;
- Develop a re-launch event to highlight the new aspects of the program;
- Create a logo and merchandising materials for future project hosts to use;
- Connect the store to various options of local distribution including both produce and shelf-stable products, and connect to the "San Diego Grown 365" locally grown campaign; and

- Identify a community volunteer group or individual to build a stand for the edible produce plants and coordinate with SNAP Gardens: Food Stamps Grow Gardens for marketing materials.

Long-term goals include:

- Develop a program that is sustainable and can be maintained by retail site staff;
- Certify the store as a “San Diego Grown 365” location;
- Develop a clear initiative supported by guidelines that can be implemented in additional retail sites that have a prepared food section; and
- Maintain local produce and product distribution to the store and introduce to surrounding sites.

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

CX³ Youth Work Hard to Give Life to Community Garden Idea

Intervention Summary

When the youth of the Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX³) project, in partnership with Escondido Education COMPACT and County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, first assessed the Mission Park neighborhood of Escondido, they realized that access to healthy food was an issue. To make matters worse, one of the two large grocery stores in the area closed down, further limiting the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables. The youth decided to take action and bring fresh produce into the Mission Park area by creating a community garden.

The youth partnered with Mission Middle School to restore their existing school garden in hopes that the school may eventually make it open to all Mission Park residents. The entire garden had to be reconstructed in the month before school started. CX³ youth were faced with a tremendous amount of work, but they did not let this slow them down. With the help of a garden coordinator and master gardener, they recruited community volunteers to get into the trenches alongside them. The youth and volunteers rolled up their sleeves and spent multiple days per week sweating under the hot summer sun as they cleared away dried brush, broke down unusable garden beds, and rooted up and replaced the old irrigation system. Once this was completed, the youth and volunteers shoveled in new soil to build new beds, lay out a drip irrigation system, and install a new pathway through the garden, all before arriving at the grand task of planting seeds. Through all of their hard work, CX³ youth were able to create a beautiful space that is budding with potential - along with their newly planted fruits and vegetables.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The CX³ youth had a great idea in wanting to create a garden, but they had no idea where to begin, or how to finish all the work needed before the school year started. They overcame this challenge through community collaboration. With the help of a local master gardener and a garden coordinator hired by COMPACT, they were able to figure out the logistics and guide their energy into a fruitful outcome. In addition, businesses and organizations donated time, resources, and equipment to help make each work party successful. Most importantly, Mission Park residents responded to the youth's call for help and showed up at the garden ready to lend a helping hand and complete whatever tasks were necessary.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Previous Mission Middle School student Jesse Guerrero stated, "I come back because I like working outside and seeing how it grows from day to day." CX³ youth hope to shape more of these positive experiences by providing opportunities for students, school staff, and community members to participate in the sustainability and success of the garden. The plan now is to continue recruiting community members to assist CX³ and COMPACT in sustaining the garden. CX³ also plans to promote community events to allow Mission Park residents to come into the garden to take produce home, and to showcase the garden and encourage families within the community to pursue their own gardening activities. In the future CX³ plans to investigate the logistics of establishing a farm stand or farmers market in Mission Park.

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

Linda Placita: How Eight Parking Spaces Were Transformed Into a Community Plaza

Intervention Summary

Parklets are low-cost improvements to urban environments that usually involve extending sidewalks to provide amenities and green space for people using the street. About a year ago, a few community members in Linda Vista noticed parklets being installed in other San Diego communities and they witnessed how spaces were transformed from excess parking spots into lively public spaces. The community members decided that they wanted to see something similar in their neighborhood to connect their farmers market with a gathering space. The idea was presented at the Linda Vista Planning Group, and the librarian at the Linda Vista Library suggested converting some of the parking spaces in the library parking lot, which is adjacent to the farmers market, into a public space.

Community stakeholders, including Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX³) and County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency staff, began talking to city planners and other city departments about the project. The project caught the attention of the City of San Diego's Civic Innovation Lab, which helped steer the project through the city's planning process so that the plaza could be created. CX³ residents, who had been trained in community engagement through the Resident Leaders Academy (RLA) group at Bayside Community Center, were also integral to the success of the plaza. The CX³ residents participated in the initial design process, gathered family and friends to paint the space on multiple occasions, and worked with a local business to secure donations for flowers. The CX³ team also helped decide a name for the plaza: "Linda Placita." "Linda" means "beautiful" in Spanish and honors the Linda Vista community; "Placita" means "little plaza" in Spanish. A City Council member provided funds for potted trees, benches, and tables

for the space. CX³ Project Coordinators also pitched in by engaging community partners, helping at the community builds, and planning events. On August 7, 2014, a grand opening (pictured above) was held in the plaza. A representative from the Mayor's office, a City Council member, and over 120 people attended the event to celebrate the creation of the plaza. The plaza increases access to safe physical environments for residents to be physically active. It is also adjacent to the farmers market so residents can enjoy the space after they purchase their healthy food.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The main barrier to the creation of the plaza was ensuring that the new plaza met the City of San Diego's requirements for parking. The CX³ Project Lead and a member of the Linda Vista Community Development Corporation researched the requirements for the number of spaces in the library's parking lot by talking with City of San Diego staff. There were more parking spaces than required for the size of the library building, so this hurdle was cleared. The eight parking spaces also included one of three entrances to the library parking lot from the street. The City asked the head of the Community Development Corporation to seek the local fire department's support for closing one of the entrances to the parking lot. The fire department fully supported the change.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The plaza was set up as a temporary space to experiment with the plaza concept before more permanent changes are made. If the community continues to use the space, a long-term solution will be pursued, which would include grass and other permanent landscaping. While there are many community partners involved, it will be important to host regular programming in the plaza so that more community members get to know and love the space. If the long-term solution is sought, another challenge will be seeking funding for a community-driven design process and the permanent changes. While the Linda Vista community has historically faced many challenges and a lack of funding, there are strong ties between community members. Those ties became even stronger through the process of creating the park, and stakeholders are confident that Linda Placita will have a positive impact on the community for many years.



Photo caption: The eight parking spaces in the Linda Vista Library's parking lot before the conversion into a public plaza.

Contact information about this Narrative

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

Safe Routes to Healthy Places

Intervention Summary

The City of National City improved access to healthy places by building wider sidewalks, bulb outs to calm traffic and ramps that meet ADA (American Disabilities Act) standards to shorten pedestrian crossing distances in the Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX³) Old Town Neighborhood. The changes represent how the community came together for collective impact and improved safe routes to healthy places in the underserved area of the city.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This journey is only a couple of blocks and it's taken many steps to achieve. Kimball Elementary in National City celebrated "Walk to School Day" on Thursday, August 14, 2014. This was an event that culminated a series of efforts focused on improving walkability and accessibility in the Old Town Neighborhood of National City. The walk from Big B's Market to Kimball Elementary is only two blocks, but it took three years and \$1.8 million to improve. It started in 2011, when National City Resident Leadership Academy (RLA) participants selected walkability improvements in the Old Town section of National City as one of their community improvement projects (CIPs). They presented their plans to the city council and planner, friends and families, and other residents during their graduation ceremony. The city asked to meet with the residents to discuss the RLA community improvement plans and how they aligned to the city's vision. During the RLA graduates'

and city meeting, the city presented their future plans to improve the sidewalks and bike lanes around the Old Town Neighborhood. The city planner and engineer listened to RLA graduates' input and incorporated advice into their plan. Unfortunately, shortly after the meeting, the State of California dissolved city redevelopment agencies along with the funds which were allocated to city improvements. The City was forced to put the walkability project on hold.

In 2012, through the CX³ Project and with support of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, residents again expressed the need to fix the walkability in the project area. A resident and former project coordinator of the CX³ project presented before City Council, bringing the walkability in Old Town to the forefront of improvements needed in the city. The City applied to different funding sources to obtain the necessary infrastructure dollars to implement the project. The \$1.8 million project was funded through a \$730,000 federal Safe Routes to School Grant, portions of a \$2 million SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Program Grant, and local TransNet and gas tax funds. The City began construction in December 2013 and the project was completed in the summer of 2014.

The City of National City built wider sidewalks, bulb outs for traffic calming and shortened pedestrian crossing distances including ramps that meet the ADA standards. The biggest changes can be seen at Kimball Elementary. The school zone is clearly marked with bright signage, striped raised crosswalk, new lighting and landscaping. The school has a new plaza area with benches and bike rack. These changes expand all the way to Big B's Market, which is a corner store two blocks from the school and is a participant in the *Retail Program* led by UC San Diego Center for Community Health. These redevelopment improvements not only encourage children to walk and bike to school, but also increase their access to healthy food. Additionally, Rady Children's Hospital Safe Routes to School Program trained parents as parent patrol volunteers to ensure children make it safely to school.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

In addition to the substantial environmental improvements made by the City, CX³ residents will continue to be involved in Safe Routes to Healthy Places by promoting environmental and systems changes to support walkability and access to healthy food in the Old Town neighborhood of National City. In the future, Rady Children's Hospital, in collaboration with the City, will install one kiosk in front of Big B's Market and one kiosk in front of the school. Students will purchase healthy food at the market, swipe their student ID, and then swipe their ID again once they walk to the school. This technology will be one way to measure how many students walk at least two blocks to school.

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