



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: A Camino Del Sol Community Garden Member Finds Success in Health at the Garden

Title

A Camino Del Sol Community Garden Member Finds Success in Health at the Garden

Intervention Summary

A challenge faced in the La Colonia CX3 neighborhood based on CX³ assessments and input from community residents that accessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as to healthy foods in general, is limited. The Camino Del Sol Community Garden, a community garden established approximately seven years ago, was created with a vision to help resolve some of the issues around access to healthy foods. The garden invites local residents from the Colonia neighborhood to become a member by signing up to take care of a designated plot within the garden, preparing the land, planting the food items and maintaining during growth and harvest. One garden member has shared her story with us. She wanted to share her experience of being a part of the community garden, some of the changes she has made and how it has made a real impact on her life, with respect to the health benefits she has achieved. In a letter, she reports that when she joined the Camino Del Sol Community Garden, her blood sugar levels were “out of control”. Her doctor told her that she has Type II Diabetes. Her doctor’s recommendation was to consume more vegetables in her diet. The participant fortunately was accepted as a member of the garden and began her own plot. She started by growing zucchini, chard and kale. She did not know how to cook her first crop of vegetables when she brought these to her home after harvest. However, with recipes that she received from friends and accessed on the internet, she learned how to prepare delicious meals using vegetables. She is still amazed at how “fresh and tasty” vegetables can be straight from the garden. This member is proud to announce that after a year in the garden her blood sugar levels are “under control”, as per her doctor’s assessment. She has lost 15 pounds. She has learned to make a “really good broccoli

omelet”, as well as other healthy snacks and meals using food grown from the garden. She is grateful for the opportunity the community garden has provided her, notably the accessibility of growing her own vegetables. She thanks the garden staff and community for “giving her a chance at a healthy life”. This member reports that because of the community garden, she has become more physically active through garden activities and responsibilities. Planting and harvesting her own vegetables, and learning new ways of healthy cooking have been a crucial part of her success as she describes above. As the Community Garden Project through the Camino Del Sol Community Garden continues, we hope to provide these types of opportunities to the community at large and to engage as many as possible in activities that promote a healthy lifestyle.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The barriers encountered thus far include:

- Finding and making time in a busy schedule to tend to the garden and responsibilities of maintaining a plot.
- The challenges of learning new gardening skills, such as how to prepare the land, how to water, seasonality of vegetables, types and variety of vegetables, how to harvest and prepare these food items, etc.
- There is a waiting list for community members to gain access to their own plot in the garden and there are only a limited amount of plots.
- Staff time and funds allocated to organize and maintain of all items and responsibilities garden related.

The proposed solutions:

- Providing ongoing support to new and existing garden members, with respect to training in the area of maintaining a plot, including growing and harvesting.
- Garden meetings are a way to meet with the members regularly and an opportunity to provide training and technical support.
- Finding new ways to divide plots in a way that increases accessibility to community members can be supportive.
- Allocate appropriate time, specifically, for staff to organize and maintain all items garden related, including the facilitation of community members, schools and other organizations to receive garden-based nutrition education on a regular basis.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Our goal is to continue to work with the community in providing access to the garden and to the cultivation of fresh produce. Along with this will come ongoing training and support in the area of growing healthy food. We will continue to seek new members and to market the garden to the local community. We will also continue any opportunity to integrate the garden and all that it has to offer into the local community, such as in Food Day 2014, arranging school-age children educational opportunities at the garden, and even provide community service opportunities for youth and adults alike.

Contact information about this Narrative

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Grant #: 13-20498

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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.