

The Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health Research

In the District of Columbia, the percentage of low-income and minority children are on the rise. It was estimated in 2008 that 13.3% of low-income children aged 2-4 years was obese. Access to cost affordable healthy foods and safe places to participate in physical activity are not sufficient in low-income neighborhoods. Therefore, daycare or school settings are efficient locations to reach these children and implement nutrition and physical activity into the curriculum for obesity prevention.

The Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health continues to do excellent work in the community. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) was reported on to the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP) was reported on to NIFA through the WEBNEERS website. In addition to these valuable services, we have mirrored some aspects of nutrition education under the SNAP-Ed and EFNEP programs, delivering the following programs and services to DC residents during the reporting cycle:

- Grocery Store Tours
- Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program
- Farmers' Market Nutrition Education Program

Grocery Store Tours

"Cooking Matters at the Store" is a CNDH nutrition education program. A nutrition specialist coordinates the program, conducting outreach in all eight Wards of the District, teaching different age groups how to better understand what they are eating and make smarter decisions. The specialist leads "grocery store tours," teaching participants how to shop healthy on a budget. These tours are conducted over a 12-week period in various grocery stores around the District, with an average of 5-10 participants per class. At the end of each tour, everyone receives a \$10 food shopping gift card to be used towards the purchase of healthy foods.

During these weekly, interactive grocery store classes, participants are taught how to read food labels, identify acceptable levels of salt and sugar in food, and understand if food is really as nutritious as advertised. The participants are part of a diabetes management group where learning how to eat healthy foods is vital for managing their disease. These classes are held in the typical grocery stores where participants would regularly shop for food. The focus is on helping participants to make small life changes that will more likely be sustained rather than a total change in diet that will be more difficult to maintain in the future.

"Cooking Matters at the Store" is funded by a grant from the **Share Our Strength** program, a national nonprofit that aims to end hunger in America by connecting people with the nutritious food they need to lead healthy, active lives. Program participants are organized through CNDH partners: Unity Clinics,



DCPS community and parent outreach groups, Transition Housing Corporation, DC libraries, DCPS New Heights program and senior centers.

Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program

From its inception in 2011 with the pilot program consisting of 380 patients in six sites across four states, the success of the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRx) is quite evident, having expanded to twelve sites in seven states and Washington, D.C. in just one year. The program is a collaborative and integrative program through the "WeCan!" initiative where healthcare providers and farmers markets partner together to provide increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables, measuring the impacts of increased consumption among underserved community members.

Each week, FVRx participants receive prescriptions (that cover the cost) for fresh produce that they can redeem at local farmers markets, some of which can be found on site at the healthcare clinics. The idea is that the weight of a legitimate prescription by a healthcare practitioner, which also covers the cost of \$1 per day per family member (about \$120 per month), would incentivize participants and mitigate some of 2014 University of the District of Columbia Combined Research and Extension Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results the barriers to eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

We joined the partnership with Wholesome Waves, DC Greens and Unity Healthcare. Three members from CAUSES' Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health along with three students in the Nutrition and Food Science Program (NUFS) contribute to the fight against obesity and diet-related chronic disease by conducting monthly nutrition education and food demonstration activities that highlight fruits and vegetables that can be found at the local farmers markets.

With its significant and sustainable impact made visible by the increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and reduction in BMI seen with patients, the FVRx program continues to grow.

Farmers Markets, Nutrition Education and Food Demonstration

The Center for Sustainable Development operates a local Farmers Market on Connecticut Ave. The market is an organized allocation of space for 10-12 independent farmers/vendors from the DC metro area. The market operated for a total of 27 Saturdays, May-November. Over 20,000 contacts were served through this venue.

Additionally, the Center partnered with Arcadia's mobile market to establish a business environment for two permanent markets in two food desert areas of the District.

UDC selected St. Elizabeth's Gateway Pavilion (Ward 8) and Providence Hospital (Ward 5) as locations for the two additional Mobile Market stops this season under its sponsorship. Both are located in USDA food deserts in predominantly low-income areas. Both are first-time locations for the Arcadia Mobile Market.

Outside of the grant responsibilities, Arcadia makes an additional once monthly market stop at St. Elizabeth's Gateway, serving the same population and promoting the weekly UDC-sponsored market stops.

The Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health has a big presence at farmers markets around the District of Columbia. The Farmers Market Nutrition Education Program provides nutrition education at point-of-purchase for market goers. The program also provides on-site food demonstrations using fresh produce from the market, recipes and nutrition data for foods sold at markets. Food demonstrations and cooking activities provide interactive instruction on healthy cooking techniques, modifying favorite recipes to include healthier ingredients by reducing the sugar, sodium, and fat. Classes are open to the general public. This is a seasonal program/activity.

Chef Herb Holden also attends local farmers markets and conducts fresh food demonstrations including fruit and vegetable carvings to get children interested in eating healthier foods. In addition, he informs farmers market customers about that buying fruits and vegetables in season is cheaper and gives them information about how to preserve the produce out of the current season.

Food demonstrations provide interactive instruction on healthy cooking techniques, modifying favorite recipes to include healthier ingredients and a free sample. One of the unique concepts behind the market food demonstrations is that we use ingredients and produce from the market's vendors. Hence, a shopper is more likely to purchase the same ingredients directly from the market after tasting a sample. The chefs and educators also provide food safety education and health tips, and offers nutrition information and cooking tips to market shoppers.

According to USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, farmers markets are becoming fresh food mainstays for people across all socioeconomic, political and ethnic classifications. They serve as community anchors, promoting the regional economy and local farm businesses, increased access to fresh, nutritious food, and stronger social networks that help keep communities healthy. In addition to providing easier access to fresh food, studies show establishing a farmers' market can revitalize a neighborhood, enhance social interaction and provide a supplemental source of farm income for many growers. Farmers markets increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables for consumers and play an important role in combating childhood obesity.

There are outputs and outcomes that we will not be reporting on for this reporting period due to 1) project termination/completion in FY 13 for which we previously reported and 2) SNAP-Ed and EFNEP work that we have reported through another federal agency.

Embedded Internships

The CAUSES Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health (CNDH) piloted a new nutrition curricula specifically designed to address the food related public health issues of African-Americans and descendants of

Africans across the diaspora. *A Taste of African Heritage* is a program established by Oldways, a nonprofit food and nutrition education organization. The program introduces a six-week curriculum that focuses on nutrition education, traditional African heritage foods and cultural history.

The purpose of the program is to reduce health disparities by reconnecting African-Americans to the history, culture and foods associated with their African ancestors. The program's foundation lies in the extensive research conducted by physicians, dietitians, and historians and the evidence-based eating models that serves as a guide to teach healthy cooking using traditional foods that are familiar to African-Americans – the African Heritage Pyramid.

Students working with the landgrant Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health gain experience in leadership, teaching, and nutrition education by offering community cooking classes that are culturally appropriate and facilitate positive change in eating habits to reduce preventable food related illness.



Former Nutrition Student, Lashell Staples, teaching community nutrition and cooking in 2015