

Bronx Health REACH News

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MAKING
HEALTH
EQUALITY
A REALITY

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Making Health Equality a Reality

A Letter from our Project Director

Dear Friends,



Charmaine Ruddock, MS

Research shows that the southwest Bronx suffers from the highest rates of overweight, obesity, diabetes and heart disease in New York City. Rates of obesity and diabetes are rising rapidly in low-income areas due, in part, to limited access to healthy food and fitness activities. There is much room for improvement in the quality of food that is offered at schools, restaurants and bodegas. To address this, the Bronx Health REACH Coalition has made nutrition and fitness a top priority. As a co-convenor of the Healthy Bronx Campaign, we are working to create a Bronx where healthy food is easier to find and afford than high fat, low nutrient products; where residents can easily find safe, affordable places for fitness activities; and where schools serve our children healthy food and drinks. Our efforts are made possible by the partnerships we have forged with restaurants, bodegas, the New York State and City Departments of Health, churches, community groups, school-based health centers and the Department of Education. We hope that the theme of this issue of the REACH newsletter – food access and nutrition – will inspire you to take an active stand in your community in tackling these issues and help you to make changes in your own nutrition behavior.

Sincerely,

Charmaine Ruddock, MS

Community Food Assessment Initiative

by Amanda Diehl

The Bronx Health REACH coalition is working to improve the health of fellow southwest Bronx residents who suffer disproportionately from nutrition-related illnesses.

There is a need to increase the supply of fresh and affordable healthy food in bodegas, supermarkets and green grocers. REACH has been working with community partners to implement a *Community Food Assessment* to make the needed changes in the food system.

The assessment is a means of understanding the community's concerns about the availability of healthy, affordable food. It also serves as a catalyst to help communities advocate for changes in their neighborhoods.

Community Food Assessments are gaining attention as innovative, practical approaches to addressing local food-related issues. They raise awareness of food security and create lasting, positive change

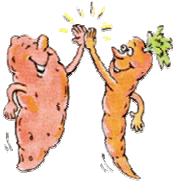
in a community.

We encourage everyone to evaluate food choices in their neighborhood and ask themselves: "What do I want available in my community?"

For more information about the southwest Bronx's *Community Food Assessment* and/or how to get involved, please contact Brooke Bennett at Bronx Health REACH, 212-633-0800, x1344, or email bbennett@institute2000.org.

Healthy Hearts Restaurants Trim the Fat . . .

by Kate Fahy



In New York City, where heart disease is the leading cause of death and more than a third of New Yorker's daily food is prepared away from home, *Bronx Healthy Hearts Restaurant Initiative (BHH)* is saving lives.

Our eleven restaurants actively promote the heart-healthy, tasty dishes already on their menus (for example, rotisserie chicken or baked fish) while exploring new ways to use less fat in their kitchens.

And now we've got the Mayor behind us. Bronx Healthy Hearts was

an early supporter of the city's proposal to ban trans fat in NYC eateries.

Beginning in July 2007, NYC restaurants will be required to replace all cooking oils and spreads (like margarine) that contain trans fat with heart-healthy alternatives, and take steps to ensure that they are not cooking, frying or baking with ingredients that contain these heart-clogging fats.

The City says the healthier oils are readily available to NYC restaurants and can cost the same as the trans fat versions.

"Nonetheless," said Geysil Arroyo,

Program Coordinator for BHH, "we have called on the Department of Health to work with local distributors to ensure fair—or even temporarily discounted—prices to the restaurants. And we'd like to see them continue their trans fat education campaign for the long haul. Bronx Healthy Hearts is looking forward to continuing ours!"

Funding for BHH is provided by the New York State Healthy Hearts Program.

More information on how to tell the difference between good and bad fats appears on page 4 of this newsletter.

New York State Commissioner visits REACH

by Geysil Arroyo

On February 16, 2007 the New York State Commissioner of Health, Dr. Richard Daines, visited **Estrella Bella** – a Bronx Healthy Hearts (BHH) restaurant – to learn more about the work REACH and BHH are doing to improve the food environment of residents of the southwest Bronx.

REACH staff discussed their work to reverse the alarming rates of diabetes in the Bronx. The highlight of the visit was the *BHH Restaurant Initiative*. The Commissioner asked how restaurant owners were recruited to participate in the program and the program's impact in the community. The REACH staff explained that many owners are very sensitive to the health problems in their community based on first-hand experience with diabetes among family members and often demonstrate a strong commitment to making health changes.

The Commissioner was impressed to hear that many people benefit from these programs on a day-to-day basis. He noted that as a physician, he appreciated the work REACH is doing and expressed support for our organization to continue *to reach* out to as many people as possible.

In addition to the restaurant and bodega initiatives, the Commissioner learned about the Coalition's faith-based, *Fine, Fit and Fabulous* nutrition and fitness program.



Estrella Bella restaurant adorned with Bronx Healthy Hearts menus

PS/IS 218 Celebrates Healthy Eating

by Geysil Arroyo

On February 6, 2007 over 900 students at PS/IS 218 enjoyed a special *Healthy Snack Celebration*. The celebration was a collaboration of the school and Bronx Healthy Hearts to promote a healthy environment for students and residents of the community.

Teachers distributed snacks like multigrain crackers and 100% apple juice and had a mini-lesson about healthy eating. Some students worked with their art teacher to create posters about how to keep a heart healthy.

The school's healthy snack celebration was reinforced when **Fine-Fare** supermarket agreed to showcase the healthy products to demonstrate to parents and students that these snacks are available at their local grocery store.

BHH has helped nine public schools in the southwest Bronx develop wellness policies to reverse the current trends of childhood obesity and diet-related diseases. At each school, BHH staff helps to establish a Wellness Committee, comprised of faculty, staff and parents. The committee assesses key health factors in the school, agrees on an action plan, and commits to sustaining the effort over time.



Vegetable and fruit shape balloons filled the cafeteria where students were treated to healthy snacks, like raisins and pretzels

At PS/IS 218 the committee agreed to work on a *Healthy Snack Policy*, which prompted the celebration. The school administration sent a list of recommended snacks home to parents along with an announcement of the new snack policy.

The schools have joined the REACH *Adopt-a-Bodega* campaign, in which five participating bodegas carry the same healthy snack items. Funding for BHH is provided by the NYS Healthy Hearts Program.

REACH churches become Fine, Fit and FABULOUS . . .

by Bethany Gotkin



Fine, Fit and Fabulous participants at Believer's Christian Fellowship Church

An article, 'Why is the Church so Fat?' caught the attention of a REACH faith-based outreach initiative leader, Loyce Godfrey. In response, Ms. Godfrey designed and launched an exciting new program

called *Fine, Fit and Fabulous*.

Program participants enjoy an exciting combination of nutrition education and gospel aerobics, firmly connected to Biblical teachings and principles. As a result of this unique connection to staying healthy, significant weight losses have been reported.

Francine Freeman, a participant from the Walker Memorial Baptist Church, believes the best part of the program is the education she receives that prepares her to take better care of her health. Loyce Godfrey adds, "Fine, Fit and Fabulous provides

insight and attacks underlying causes of food obsession; it is designed to bring health and deliverance, exposing the spiritual roots of our problems."

Next up for the *Fine, Fit and Fabulous* program is an adaptation for Latino churches. Funding and other support for this program is provided by the New York State Department of Health Diabetes and Control Program.

For information about how your church can participate in the program, please contact Brooke Bennett at 212-633-0800, x1344.

What Can I Do? Support Low Fat, Unsweetened Milk in our Schools!

by Brooke Bennett



Last year, New York City's Board of Education (BOE) took a bold step toward improving the health of our children. As part of a successful effort to make school meals healthier, the Office of School Food removed whole milk from the citywide school menu and replaced it with 1% (low-fat) and skim (fat-free) milk varieties.

Whole milk is a significant source of saturated fat—the type that contributes to heart disease—in children's diets. Low-fat and skim milk provide all of the nutrients found in whole milk, such as calcium and vitamin D, but with fewer calories and little to no saturated fat.

Most NYC schools offer children three types of milk: 1%, skim, and chocolate flavored skim during school meals. In an effort to address high rates of obesity and diabetes among Bronx children, the BOE reduced the number of times per week that students in 55 Bronx schools were offered chocolate or flavored skim milk, since they contain much added sugar.

Children are heavily influenced by food producers to choose food and beverages loaded with sugar, salt, fat and artificial colors. As a result, they turn away from healthier, less processed foods and develop habits likely to continue into adulthood.

From the beginning of the new, low fat milk policy in area schools, representatives of the Dairy Industry have been trying to get the City Council to block these changes. In March 2007, the New York City Council passed a resolution asking the BOE to reintroduce vanilla and strawberry milks in NYC schools in hopes of improving milk consumption rates.

REACH believes the nutrition policies implemented in Bronx schools and citywide help teach children to make nutritious food choices in their lives. The following are a few things you as parents, caregivers and role models can do to help our children make healthier food choices:

- Switch to 1% or skim, plain milk at home.
- Tell your school officials (school principal, parent coordinator, cafeteria staff) to keep serving low fat, plain milk at all school meals.
- Phone your city council member(s) about supporting the original Office of School Food milk policy of plain, low fat and skim milk in schools.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Geysil Arroyo at Bronx Healthy Hearts, 212-633-0800, ext 1340 or email garroyo@institute2000.org

Good Fats versus Bad Fats

All fat is not created equal. Some unsaturated fats can lower your risk for heart disease, while saturated and trans fats are leading causes of life-threatening heart problems and obesity. But even the good fats, like those found in olive oil, avocados, and nuts, should be enjoyed in moderation to maintain a healthy weight and a healthy heart. So while you can look forward to the day when trans fat won't be a part of your favorite dish (*see article on page 2*), you should still limit your total fat intake by choosing baked and grilled dishes, avoiding fried foods, eating less meat, and limiting portion sizes.



Monounsaturated fats lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol) and increase the HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Nuts are high in monounsaturated fats, but still should be enjoyed in moderation.



Health Disparity Research

We have listed a few recent research papers and articles that discuss food availability, nutrition, and obesity; the first two articles discuss the role of *Community Food Assessments*. These materials can be accessed online or at your local library.

- Action Food Assessment Report. (2004) "Active Community to Improve our Nutrition." Community Services Unlimited Inc.
- Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: An Assessment and Scorecard of Community Food Security in the District of Columbia. (2006) D.C. Hunger Solutions.
- Delva J, O'Malley PM and Johnston LD. (2006) "Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Status Differences in Overweight and Health Related Behaviors Among American Students: National Trends 1986-2003." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39(4): 536-545.
- Russell P Lopez and H Patricia Hynes (2006). Obesity, Physical Activity and the Urban Environment: Public Health Research Needs." *Environmental Health*, 5:25.