

Bronx Health REACH

Spring 2011

**MAKING
HEALTH
EQUALITY
REALITY**

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Making Health Equality a Reality

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A Letter from Our Project Director



Dear Readers,

Within the past several months, we have seen the federal government recognize the overweight and obesity epidemic in the United States and promote the importance of a healthy diet and exercise, critical steps in the prevention of diet-related diseases such as diabetes. The First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign has encouraged communities, schools, and faith-based organizations to eat right and exercise. In addition, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Agriculture released the 2010 version of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which emphasizes a plant-based diet with more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, moderate portions of lean meats, poultry and eggs, low-fat and fat-free dairy products, and reduced solid fats, added sugars, and sodium.

For the past 11 years, we at Bronx Health REACH have been working hard with our community partners to correct the root causes of racial and ethnic health disparities. We know that access to healthy food and nutrition information and opportunities for physical activity are necessary for adopting a healthy lifestyle. Through our community partners, we've learned that nutrition education – while important – is not enough to lead to healthier eating habits. As a result, we have been helping organizations and churches to serve healthier meals, establish and enforce wellness and nutrition policies, and encourage people to support and promote stores selling healthier foods within their own communities.

We invite you to read about what we've been up to, and to join us in working to eliminate health disparities relating to obesity and diabetes.

Sincerely,

*Charmaine Ruddock, MS
Project Director
Bronx Health REACH*

Combating Childhood Obesity: Prevention is the Key

By Diana Johnson, Bronx Health REACH

You hear it over and over again in the news: our children are getting bigger and bigger, causing a serious problem in our country. Today, almost one in every three children in our nation is overweight or obese. Children who are obese are more likely to get Type 2 Diabetes and other obesity-related health problems like high blood pressure and heart disease later in life.

First Lady Michelle Obama is raising awareness to combat childhood obesity with her “Let’s Move” campaign. Bronx Health REACH is contributing to this national effort with our new Obesity Prevention Program. In 2010, REACH was awarded a grant from the Johnson & Johnson/John Hopkins Community Health Care Scholars Program to provide children with nutrition education that has been proven to work, also known as “evidence-based.” The “Bienestar/NEEMA Health Program” is the evidence-based curriculum we are using. It was created by the Social and Health Research Center in San Antonio, Texas. Over the next year, REACH will work with elementary schools in the Bronx to train school teachers on how to teach the Bienestar/NEEMA curriculum with a focus on obesity prevention. This class will be offered twice a week for 45 minutes. The children will learn about choosing healthy foods, the steps to good health, and setting personal goals every week to improve their habits. There are six lessons in the curriculum.

Equally important is the fact that as part of our program, children’s parents are encouraged to participate in four afterschool workshops held at the school. These workshops cover drinking water instead of sugary drinks; eating home-cooked meals,

fruits and vegetables versus fast food; and engaging in physical activity. Each workshop includes a goal-setting activity where participants have the opportunity to set weekly goals to improve their health. In addition, the parents are given a pedometer and step log to track the number of steps they are taking in a day with the goal of reaching 10,000 daily steps.

In order to evaluate whether this program is effective or not, we are asking the students to complete a test before and after the program that asks questions about their knowledge, attitude and behaviors around nutritious eating. In addition, the children’s height and weight is taken at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program in the school nurse’s office. We will analyze the information we collect using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s EpiInfo software.

In March 2011, we completed the pilot program with two third grade classrooms at the Bronx Academy of Promise Charter School. The children were very excited about the program and asked a lot of questions. The long-term goal is to expand the program to reach 600 students in the third and fourth grades in elementary schools in the South Bronx over the next two years.

HEA+LTHY Schools NY

By Sigrid Aarons, Bronx Health REACH

In addition to the Bienestar/NEEMA Health Program, Bronx Health REACH is working to improve school wellness policies and practices in districts 7 and 9 of the Bronx with

funding from the New York State Department of Health. This program, known as HEA+LTHY Schools NY, is currently working with six public elementary and two middle/junior high schools on three target issues: competitive foods (foods sold or served during fundraisers, celebrations, and in vending machines), physical fitness (developing a physical education plan for each school so that each child receives a minimum of 120 minutes of physical activity per week), and tobacco-free policies for within and around the school.

The first task for HEA+LTHY Schools NY, which now operates in PS 5, PS 18, and PS 43 in District 7, and PS 457, PS 332, JHS 145, PS 64, and PS 218 in District 9, has been to complete the School Health Index (SHI), a school health and wellness assessment tool created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The SHI evaluates the school’s nutrition and health services, health and physical education programs, safety protocols, staff wellness programs, family/community services and support/counseling programs.

So far, the “weakest link” in wellness for these schools seems to be in the area of health promotion for staff and family and community involvement. Schools are currently creating action plans to address areas in need of improvement, and one school has already scheduled after-school fitness classes for both staff and parents. In the area of nutrition, some schools have identified an interest in obtaining water jets (think “slushy” machine, only with just water), salad bars, and/or implementing the Breakfast in the Classroom program, which has been shown to

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HEA+LTHY Schools NY (continued)

improve student attention and reduce lateness. In addition, HEA+LTHY Schools NY provides \$500 mini-grants to participating schools for projects that improve their nutrition, fitness and/or tobacco-free environment.

HEA+LTHY Schools NY is also working beyond school buildings in an effort to ensure that strong school wellness policies are adopted and enforced at the district level, and eventually city-wide. To this end, the program has created a Policy Advisory Committee that meets monthly as part of the Bronx Health REACH Nutrition and Fitness Workgroup. The meetings are attended by members of the former Department of Education (DOE) Region 1 Workgroup that successfully removed whole milk from public school cafeterias. Current policy priorities under HEA+LTHY Schools NY include: limiting access to junk food during the school day and after-school activities,

making sure students have access to fresh fruits, vegetables and water each day and have adequate time to eat breakfast and lunch, increasing opportunities for physical activity, and ensuring adequate tobacco prevention education.

Through HEA+LTHY Schools NY, Bronx Health REACH has a unique opportunity to work closely with school staff, parents and administrators, and to partner with a variety of public and private agencies to improve nutrition, physical activity and prevent tobacco use. The program will continue to recruit new schools to participate during the 2011-2012 school year, including at least one high school and one District 75 (special needs) school. If you want to know more about this program, contact Sigrid Aarons at 212-633-0800 x 1364 or Bernice McFarline at 212-633-0800 x 1344.

Pando Projects—Growing Gardens Growing Kids

By Ying Guo, Community Healthcorps member with Bronx Health REACH

Since February 2011, Bronx Health REACH has had the opportunity to expose kids at a young age to fresh fruits and vegetables through a youth gardening project with Pando Projects. Pando Projects is a NYC-based nonprofit organization that provides emerging leaders with the mentorship and tools needed to carry out their vision. Applicants with creative, grassroots ideas of how to strengthen their communities are chosen as project leaders and given a website to make local activism as easy and effective as possible.

Our work with Pando Projects is a result of the urgent needs to increase and improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the South Bronx especially for youth. With Pando Projects, we developed a 4-5 month project called Growing Gardens Growing Kids (GGGK). GGGK works with both the Early Learning Program and the HeadStart program at Mid-Bronx Council Services, a long-time member of the REACH Coalition, to teach children about growing their own food. We are using EarthBox kits to make it easier for children at that age to get involved in planting produce. EarthBox technology allows for very low-maintenance and high-yield growing through a system that makes watering

the plants easy. The boxes are also moveable by wheels and are easily reachable by young children.

We are working with 17 teachers to grow plants in 17 different EarthBoxes. Plants include everything from sweet peas to strawberries. Each Pre-K class is responsible for one EarthBox. Through an adapted Pre-K to Grade 1 EarthBox Curriculum, the students will not only help plant the produce for their garden but also learn about the plants where their fruits and vegetables come from, how plants grow, how to read and write plant names, and also why eating fresh fruits and vegetables is good



Children at Mid-Bronx Council Services during Growing Gardens Growing Kids lesson

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Pando Projects: Growing Gardens Growing Kids (continued)

for them. Once the produce is harvested, the nutrition staff at Mid-Bronx Council Services will incorporate the fruits and vegetables in the children's meals. The EarthBoxes and the curriculum will be given to the Pre-K programs at the end of the project term with the

expectation that the gardening be repeated each year. This opportunity to expose the kids at a young age to fresh fruits and vegetables has been an exciting one for the GGGK team. Join us at pilot.pandoprojects.org/ying to follow the progress of the project and to see both the kids and garden grow!

Faith-Based Nutrition Initiatives

by Carlos Devia and Kelly Moltzen, Bronx Health REACH

Over the past 11 years, the members of Bronx Health REACH's Faith-Based Outreach Initiative (FBOI) have developed programs to help educate church members about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for disease prevention. Developed by church members, these programs are rooted in scripture and help participants use their faith to make healthy lifestyle changes. Bronx Health REACH recruits nutrition and fitness experts from the communities and the churches in which they serve to help bring these programs to the Bronx Health REACH churches. These programs, which are available in both English and Spanish, include *Fine, Fit and Fabulous*, a 12 week diabetes prevention program; *God's Health Squad*, a youth program focused on healthy eating; and a Culinary Initiative, which trains church members involved in food preparation to prepare healthy meals and promote healthy nutrition practices at their churches.

Participating churches assign a Health Coordinator to help bring these and other health programs to their churches. Health Coordinators attend monthly meetings to share their experiences and learn about new opportunities for nutrition and physical activity.

Recently, we conducted a survey of the Health Coordinators to determine which health activities are currently being conducted within the churches. Out of 32 coordinators who completed the survey, 25 reported having an established health ministry in the church. Fifteen churches have completed the *Fine, Fit and Fabulous* program, 15 have developed healthy culinary committees and 5 have used *God's Health Squad* to educate their youth about healthy snacking.

In the survey, the health coordinators were also asked about new initiatives they would like to bring to their churches to directly help church members have access to healthy food. Seven health coordinators indicated that they would like to help congregants join a community garden, 5 would like to start a church garden, and 7 would like to help their congregation become members of a Community Supported Agriculture (farm share) program. In addition, 7 health coordinators want to work with church members to adopt a bodega and work with them to increase healthy food items in their stores. Other health coordinators preferred to consult with their health ministries before signing up for any of these activities. Our next steps include identifying resources and partners to support the implementation of these programs.



Healthy Heart Culinary Committee from Temple of the Living God Church

MARC Academy and Family Center

By Jill Linnell, Bronx Health REACH

MARC Academy and Family Center is one of Bronx Health REACH's original partners. For ten years the center, located on Jerome Avenue, has worked with Bronx Health REACH to promote healthy eating. The program focuses not only on what is taught in the classroom, but on transforming the entire environment to support and promote healthy choices for children and their families.

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MARC Academy and Family Center (continued)

Anna York, the executive director at MARC and an advocate for healthy eating, explains, “I see the nutritional program as not just a REACH program or a grant program. We have an ethical and moral responsibility to the children to instill in them sound nutritional views and to teach them to make good choices. I think we owe that to the children we work with and the community we serve.” Under her leadership, healthy eating has been a major priority at MARC.

The small kitchen at MARC poses a challenge to the women preparing meals for 151 preschool and school aged children each day. Given the space limitations, MARC at one time relied heavily on packaged and prepared foods that simply needed to be reheated. Bacon and eggs, hamburgers, cookies and other processed foods were common. Several years back, another long time Bronx Health REACH coalition member, Loyce Godfrey, stepped in to help. Using her background in food service management and her passion for preparing healthy but tasty foods, Ms. Godfrey trained the staff how to make the most of their small space. The key is to plan, plan, plan. By preparing menus and detailed operation plans for all preparations, the kitchen staff are able to maximize time and space to prepare most foods from scratch—even salad dressing! They also switched to a vendor who would deliver fresh produce several times a week. Menus at MARC now emphasize whole grains, low fat dairy products, and lots of fresh produce. Food served at MARC now far exceeds the nutrition standards set by city and federal agencies.

Children also have the opportunity to participate in the preparation of many of the new foods that appear on the menu at MARC. Classroom nutrition education frequently involves hands-on opportunities for children to taste and prepare new foods. Children have made their own salads, baked banana bread, and cooked applesauce. They even participate in tasting parties with the kitchen staff where children weigh in on whether a new item should be added to the menu.

Parents have become an important part of the nutrition program at MARC, too. Each year MARC holds a number of nutrition workshops for the parents at the center. Parents learn tips for preparing and serving healthy foods at home. They also have opportunities to taste the

healthy options provided at MARC. For example, on “Fathers Bring Your Child to School Day,” dads enjoyed a healthy breakfast alongside their children. Healthy messages are further reinforced through monthly calendars featuring daily health tips, quarterly newsletters highlighting nutrition information, and bulletin boards displaying nutrition information throughout MARC.

The changes at MARC have been so successful that children and parents request to bring home copies of recipes along with the menus. On a block with five fast food restaurants, it is important that MARC offers their children and parents an example of healthy eating. Bronx Health REACH is now partnering with MARC to take lessons learned there to other after school and child care settings. For more information, contact MARC Academy at 718-562-3410 or Kelly Moltzen, 212-633-0800x1328.

Leaving a Legacy of Healthy Eating

By Jill Linnell, Bronx Health REACH

As a national Center of Excellence in the Elimination of Disparities, as designated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Bronx Health REACH supports the work of different community groups working to address health disparities. The projects, called Legacy Projects, receive a small grant and assistance from Bronx Health REACH staff to complete a 12 month project targeting African American and/or Latino communities. Out of 12 projects funded so far, 6 are currently active in New York City, Virginia, and North Carolina. While all of the projects aim to eliminate health disparities, several are focusing on nutrition and fitness initiatives.

New York Faith and Justice, a coalition of faith-based organizations and leaders, chose to address the connections between health disparities and access to food in New York City. Last October they hosted the *Food, Faith, and Health Disparities Summit*. One hundred and fifty faith leaders, non-profit representatives, business leaders and community members attended. Trained facilitators led Summit participants in day-long small group discussions to explore problems and solutions with food and health disparities in the city. Five workgroups were established to carry out

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Leaving a Legacy of Health Equity (continued)



Attendees of the *Food, Faith, and Health Disparities Summit* at Riverside Church

recommendations resulting from the Summit:

Food & Farm Bill – Education on how the Farm Bill is relevant to community members, and encouraging people to bring this information to their legislators.

Food and Voter Education – Education about how faith and community groups can take personal and organizational responsibility to make healthy food choices, and about city legislation on issues of food and health.

Business outreach – Assisting faith groups in developing a long-term Adopt a Bodega plan with leadership skills, distribution models, and technical assistance.

Incentives to Purchase Healthy Foods – Education about programs that already provide a discount for healthy food, such as Health Bucks. This group will also survey consumers about healthy food options they would like to be able to purchase with food stamps, with the goal of preparing a report for policymakers based on the survey results.

Community engagement – Educating faith communities, schools, and community groups about hands-on activities to make NYC neighborhoods more healthy, such as starting food co-ops, community gardens, or farm share programs.

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger Legacy Project will bring fresh produce from Fresh Radish Farm in Goshen, NY to Bronx residents through a new community supported agriculture (CSA) program. A CSA or farm share program is a partnership between community residents and a farmer. Members buy a share in the farm and receive fresh fruits and vegetable each week. Fees are based on income levels and food stamps are accepted. Pick-up starts in June at the Grand Concourse Seventh Day Adventist Temple located at 1275 Grand Concourse (corner of 169th St.) in the Bronx. For more information, visit bronxcsa.wordpress.com or call (212) 825-0028 extension 205.

The United Federation of Teachers Legacy Project is working with 12 elementary schools in the Bronx to bring nutrition education and physical activity into the classroom. 121 teachers received training to implement the CookShop nutrition education program and 71 teachers received training to implement Move to Improve, a physical activity program. As a result 3,025 students are learning about healthy eating and are preparing fresh foods in the classroom, and 1,775 are participating in physical activity during regular classroom periods.

The Factors of the Seven, Inc. Legacy Project focuses on engaging men from seven African American and Latino churches in Charlotte, North Carolina in diabetes prevention and management. The project is also exploring what resources the churches can acquire to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Factors of the

Seven will assemble a committee to assess opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity within the partnership churches and explore opportunities to incorporate farmers markets, community gardens, walking trails, fitness rooms, YMCA partnerships, and/or walking clubs.

As you can see, our Legacy Project partners have been very busy! Look for more information about past and present Bronx Health REACH Legacy Projects in upcoming newsletters. If you would like more information about applying to become a Legacy Project, contact Jill Linnell at JLinnell@institute2000.org or 212-633-0800 x1305. Applications will be due later this spring.

Nutrition Resources

We have listed a few resources with information about health, nutrition and finding fresh, affordable food. Please contact us for more information.

- Nutrition, physical activity, and weight control - in English and Spanish <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/index.htm>
- www.HealthCastle.com
- Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity - Fast Food FACTS www.fastfoodmarketing.org
- NY State Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Alliance www.nyshepa.org
- Just Food www.justfood.org
- Harvest Home Farmers Markets www.harvesthomefm.org
- GrowNYC www.grownyc.org
- www.BronxCsa.wordpress.com
- www.southbronxcsa.org
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- Earthboxes www.earthbox.com