

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS PROGRAM

by Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties (CAPSLC)

Region 7 • Lincoln, Nebraska

www.communityactionatwork.org



Food • Children • Obesity • Health

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties (CAPSLC) and the Food Bank of Lincoln partnered together to bring healthy foods to Lincoln's most vulnerable children and families. With funding from the Community Health Endowment, we constructed a 5,000 square foot commercial kitchen and purchased a produce vehicle to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to local neighborhoods with the highest childhood obesity rates, lowest access to healthy foods, and highest poverty rates. Partnerships with Kinder Bites, Lone Tree Foods, Community CROPS, and the University of Nebraska Lancaster County Extension allowed for the distribution of hot and healthy meals, on-site meal preparation, recruitment of local farmers to utilize the kitchen, and training of food service workers.

LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

Lincoln has 60,732 children under the age of 18, of which 10,878 (17.9%) are living below the poverty level and 12,830 (21.1%) are food insecure. Children living in poverty face some of the greatest disparities in health outcomes. While this is due to a variety of factors, food insecurity – defined by the USDA as “the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food” – plays a significant role. Thirty-five percent of children living in poverty in Lincoln are age 5 and under. Children served through Head Start live in some of Lincoln's highest-needs neighborhoods: one in census tract 17, a diverse neighborhood characterized by extreme poverty (37.6%) and high childhood obesity (21.2-26%), and one



which is also in an extreme poverty tract (41%) with high childhood obesity (21.2-26%). Census tract 32.02 is characterized with 18.9% poverty, Lincoln's highest concentration of single parent females, and between 17.1-22.7% childhood obesity; census tracts 20.01 and 20.02 with 41.3% and 35% poverty, respectively.

ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

CSBG funding supports multiple facets of CAPSLC's work, including planning and preparation for the implementation of new programs, services, and initiatives. The process of planning for the Healthy Food Access Program, including an assessment of community need, was extensive. CSBG funding supported the agency's ability to identify the need, collaborate with community stakeholders, and plan the scope of the project. Without CSBG support, CAPSLC leaders would not have had the capacity to be involved in the planning process or successfully implement the project.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

Through consistent nutrition education, raising awareness of food insecurity, and connecting partner businesses and organizations, the Lincoln community has a better pulse on its low-income population and is on a path to reduced childhood obesity and stronger food security in underserved areas.

EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

While long-term outcomes, like changes in obesity and healthy food access rates, won't be realized until data is available on a community-wide level, we can point to the project's output data to get a better sense of its impact in Lincoln. For example, in 2020, the Healthy Food Access kitchen was used to prepare and serve 454,746 nutritious meals to children in Lincoln least likely to have access to healthy foods. Lincoln Fresh, a food truck that is part of the Healthy Food Access project, is used to deliver free, fresh produce to Lincoln's highest needs neighborhoods. Lincoln Fresh did not operate for much of 2020 due to the pandemic, but since the project started, it has delivered 120,543 pounds of fresh produce to 14,469 community members.

EQUITY LENS

There are many inequities when it comes to access to healthy food. Community needs data demonstrates that neighborhoods in Lincoln with the highest poverty rates also have the lowest access to healthy food. These neighborhoods also have higher rates of obesity and a lower life expectancy. This project specifically targets those neighborhoods and their residents, creating more equitable access to healthy food.

Through the Healthy Food Access Program, community members living in Census tracts with the highest rates of extreme poverty and childhood obesity are the most important program recipients. Rather than producing and delivering healthy meals to all neighborhoods in Lincoln (which would be equality), a focus on those Census tracts allows for

the advancement of equity.

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CUSTOMER VOICE

Participant input drives everything that we do. Within Early Head Start and Head Start, for example, parents have direct oversight of programs through participation on the Head Start Policy Council and Parent Committees. When concerns arise, they are immediately assessed and addressed. Feedback relating to programs and services is collected formally and informally at multiple points throughout the year.

During our most recent Community Needs Assessment process in 2020, several participants cited the impact of our Healthy Food Access programming on their lives. One specifically-cited aspect of the programming is our nutrition education and support group, FEAST (Food Education Access Support Together). One participant of FEAST said the following during our Community Needs Assessment participant survey:

"FEAST. It was a really good class. It was like 12 weeks, once a week. But I learned a lot, a lot about sugar, salt, and processing."

And, when participants were asked how they go about preparing healthy foods, one said:

"I just go to the stores, and like, search around. I try to stay at the vegetables and fruits section, instead of near the canned stuff... This is something I learned at Community Action - there was a class called FEAST."

Participant feedback is collected in other ways, too. Guests at our Gathering Place soup kitchen

consistently tell us how much they appreciate our offering of fresh fruits and vegetables in the meals we serve. Many have thanked us for serving salad, as they don't get it otherwise. Others have shared that they appreciate the balance in our meals.

Such feedback validates the importance of our Healthy Food Access programming, but also provides fodder for how it might be expanded. We will continue to use participant input and feedback as the key driver to inform the direction of current programming and future expansion.

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This publication was created by the National Association of Community Action Agencies – Community Action Partnership, in the performance of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services Grant Number, 90ETO469. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

