

Collaborative Food Distribution Matters!

Summary:

The Hispanic community knows what it means to live a healthy lifestyle but may lack necessary access to do so - including healthy foods. It was with this mind that the Hermosa Vida program collaborated with local organizations and Flagstaff communities come up with creative ways to increase food access in three neighborhoods. Local organizations and the community at large have committed to continual support of the new food access models that resulted from collaboration with Hermosa Vida. Stakeholder organizations and community leaders must commit to working together to increase sustainable access to healthy foods in ways that are meaningful to the Hispanic population.

Challenge

Hispanic residents in Flagstaff's Sunnyside, Plaza Vieja and Southside Neighborhoods know what it means to lead healthy lives. Hispanic residents in these neighborhoods do not want education on health. They want their needs met so they can have access to healthy food. They know that nutrition is linked to many chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which Hispanic/Latino populations experience at higher rates than the general population. Unfortunately, Hispanic/Latino populations disproportionately experience low access to healthy food and beverage options. Factors that limit accessibility like lack of money and time to purchase and prepare healthy foods, the distance to healthy food retailers, and lack of culturally relevant foods make it difficult for residents of these neighborhoods to consume healthy foods. Certainly money is an issue: the average income level for the residents of these three neighborhoods is \$20,000 to \$35,000 - lower than the average median income of the City overall.

Solution: Collaboration!

We worked with Market on the Move to bring this model to Flagstaff for the first time. Market on the Move created a retail location for healthy, affordable foods in the three neighborhoods, providing residents with 60 lbs. of produce for \$15.

We also collaborated with the Flagstaff EcoRanch, which is now growing produce varieties that was selected by the community at its education facility. Eco Ranch distributes this produce at Killip Elementary School for a \$1/lb donation, creating access to fresh, healthy and culturally appropriate foods for the families of Killip Elementary School students.

Volunteers from the neighborhoods and the community at large helped with day to day activities of these distribution models. Individuals from a wide spectrum of socioeconomic status worked together to increase access to healthy food in their communities.

Sustaining Success

Local organizations and residents in these neighborhoods have committed to continue this work beyond the life of the Hermosa Vida program. Community organizations across town have pledged to sponsor a monthly Market on the Move event to continue this distribution system, which can also help them with outreach efforts and sustainability of their own organizations. Killip Elementary School has pledged to continue working together with EcoRanch to make this model available next summer. These efforts will assist with the sustainability of these produce distribution models in Flagstaff. The more organizations that buy in to the success of these models, the higher the likeliness they will continue in our community.

Results

Families directly participated in growing the produce and developed a relationship with this food. Families are engaging in school-based events to share how they prepare the foods they obtain. Children come to distribution events eager to get their hands on fresh produce. Conversations are occurring around food systems and having increasingly direct access to produce. Over 600 families took advantage of these opportunities and expressed high interest in the continuance of these efforts.

Get Involved

You, too, can make this happen in your community. Support food distribution systems in your area. Inquire about a Market on the Move (or something like it) in your area. Be on the look-out for organizations that want to collaborate to bring wider access to healthy foods.

"I just wanted to thank you all for the wonderful opportunity that Market on the Move provided for all our community. I have received such positive feedback all morning and I would like to email whoever was in charge of the event and thank them for their wonderful program and encourage them to return soon."

Justin Benedict – Community Wellness Organizer & Family-School Liaison, Killip Elementary School