

Community Garden Flourishes in Parramore, Florida

Issue:

In low-income neighborhoods such as the Parramore community in Orlando, Florida, supermarkets are non-existent and access to fresh fruits and vegetables is in short supply. Parramore residents do their shopping at the old neighborhood grocery store which offers convenience type food (such as frozen pizza), alcohol and cigarettes, but no fresh produce. Yet access to affordable, nutritious food is necessary to live a healthy lifestyle.

According to a 2010 Health Affairs paper on the built environment, communities with unfavorable social conditions were at higher risk for obesity (1). Poor diet, along with physical inactivity, is also linked to certain chronic disease conditions, especially those that are diet related like diabetes and heart disease. One study estimates total costs for chronic disease in Florida, including lost productivity due to illness and premature death, approaches \$86 billion (Milken Institute 2003).

Intervention:

Get Active Orlando, a partnership of local organizations and concerned individuals, conducted two focus groups with area residents to brainstorm ways to address the issues of healthy food access and physical inactivity. A common interest that emerged from both groups was a Parramore community garden. Get Active Orlando proceeded with the idea and formed the Parramore Community Garden Council to establish an inner city food source and a vehicle for physical activity. The following partners contributed their time, expertise, and resources:

- Orange County Health Department (OCHD)
- Orlando Police Department
- City of Orlando - Neighborhood Services
- Leu Gardens
- University of Florida Extension Office
- Walt Disney World

Once issues such as permitting, irrigation, real estate and fencing were properly addressed, the real work began. Several work days were scheduled to till the land and build raised beds. Elephant and rhinoceros compost was donated by Walt Disney World to guarantee fertile soil and abundant crops. Technical assistance was given by the staff of Leu Gardens (a city-owned, famously beautiful park) and OCHD's Healthy Communities, Healthy People Coordinator (Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funded). On March 2, 2009, the historic Parramore neighborhood opened its own Community Garden.

Impact:

The Parramore Community Garden is divided into 19 plots that are maintained and harvested by local families or youth groups. Children, teenagers and parents are gardening together, bringing each family closer. When the youth are questioned on their current eating habits, they admit to eating and actually liking the vegetables they help grow, even broccoli, cauliflower, and pole beans. Neighborhood residents also use the community garden. It is a popular meeting place for residents to come together. An additional benefit from the garden is how it contributes to a more active lifestyle. In Parramore, the garden is a source of community pride.

Low-income, inner city communities like Parramore, with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables are often lacking in a basic necessity, healthy food. The Parramore Community Garden is succeeding in addressing this lack of access to fresh, affordable, healthy foods. One year after the project started, Parramore continues to grow and nurture their community garden.

(1) Gopal Singh, Mohammad Siahpush, Michael Kogan, *Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions, Built Environments, and Childhood Obesity*, Health Affairs, March 2010; 29.3

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