



Phipps Community Development Corporation's

Nourishing Our Community: A Food and
Nutrition Education Project in West Farms

Grant Results Report – September, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Phipps Community Development Corporation

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Grant Title: Nourishing Our Community: A Food and Nutrition Education Project in West Farms

Grant Amount: \$100,000

Grant ID:

Period Covered by the Grant: 1/1/2007 — 12/31/2007

Foundation Program Officer: Sara Timen

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Phipps Community Development Corporation (Phipps CDC) is a 35-year-old nonprofit organization that provides educational, vocational, and community development programs for residents of local neighborhoods across the Bronx and Manhattan, serving some 8,000 children, teens, and adults through more than 40 programs. Among its on-site and neighborhood-based social, educational, and career services are: Head Start, after-school programs, and summer camp; literacy and English as a Second Language programs; GED and college-prep programs; and work readiness, resident support, and family programs.

Phipps CDC is the social services affiliate of Phipps Houses, New York City's oldest and largest nonprofit developer of affordable housing.

Nourishing Our Community: A Food and Nutrition Education Project in West Farms

THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The South Bronx has more obese residents than elsewhere in New York City—27% of its residents, compared to 20% of New Yorkers citywide—according to a 2006 a Federal community survey. Area residents also have a high prevalence of diabetes—16% in the South Bronx, versus 10% in the Bronx overall. Contributing to the high rates of obesity and diabetes are unhealthy eating habits, which result in part from a lack of opportunities for acquiring fresh produce.

“The South Bronx is an area where there is limited access to healthy food,” says Talia Nagar, Director of Program Development, Phipps CDC. “There is only one supermarket in the neighborhood. Without supermarket competition, people have fewer options and cannot find fresh food or locally grown fruits and vegetables.”

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Through expansion of a gardening project, new educational activities, and participation in an ongoing farmers’ market, the project sought to provide nutrition information and healthy food options for people living in an impoverished urban area.

Drew Gardens, formerly a vacant, garbage-strewn, two-acre lot, and the Phipps West Farmers’ Market provided venues for the project. The farmers’ market—open Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., July to November—sold seasonal fresh produce not previously readily available in the neighborhood.

Young residents learned about food production and healthy fresh foods through a community gardening project, after-school environmental education workshops, and a teen cooking program.

UNDER THE GRANT

Over the course of the one-year grant, project staff engaged the community in a variety of activities:

In Drew Gardens:

- Prior to the growing season, project staff hired contractors to construct 20 new beds for garden members to use to grow their own food. Some 40 community gardeners enrolled as members in 2007.
- Staff also contracted for a children's section of the garden to be constructed with raised beds and a table for educational activities. They also created a wheelchair-accessible garden path.
- Staff hosted and facilitated workshops on garden planning, organic pest control, and medicinal herbs.

Activities for children and teens:

- The project organized three seven-week sessions of Teen Iron Chef, a culinary and nutrition program. At the end of the sessions, the group created a cookbook. Some 45 teens participated in 2007.
- Staff taught gardening in Phipps CDC's Beacon after-school program for students in the first through fourth grades, reaching 65 children.
- Ten groups of Head Start pre-school students visited the garden each week from April to October. The children planted and harvested their crops, and dug for worms.
- Seven summer camp groups came to the gardens weekly for seven weeks for hands-on learning.

Through the Farmers' Market's focus on fresh foods:

- Volunteers planted crops in the farmers' market area of the garden and grew food to sell to the public at the Phipps West Farmers' Market, with average weekly sales of \$500.
- Staff organized diabetes and obesity-prevention workshops, as well as cooking and food preservation demonstrations.

- During the summer, the market employed four youths part-time. They performed weekly demonstrations of their own culinary creations and assisted in setting up, marketing, and sales at the market.

Other related activities for community residents included weekly yoga classes.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVEMENT AND CHANGES TO ORIGINAL WORK PLAN

Several planned activities were not fully realized:

- The project could not conduct the planned monthly screenings for diabetes and blood pressure, due to difficulty scheduling professionals. Similarly, it could not identify a qualified instructor to conduct meditation and Tai Chi classes.
- Yoga was not held indoors in December, as participants preferred to practice yoga outdoors in moderate weather.
- Finally, higher-than-anticipated construction costs eliminated plans for an amphitheater envisioned for the garden.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Farmers' market volunteers conducted informal surveys of shoppers during the summer and fall.

After analyzing the responses, project staff reported the following:

- Residents used the market to buy fresh produce and learn about ways to cook it.
- When asked how the market could be improved, shoppers indicated they wanted more produce offered more frequently.
- First-time shoppers were drawn by incentives such as free shopping bags, coupons, workshops, and cooking demonstrations.
- Returning customers said they liked that the food was fresh and affordable and that they had changed their shopping habits to include the market.
- In 2007, the second year of the market's operations, sales revenues were four times those of the first year, indicating increased demand for fresh, healthy food in the community

Teen Iron Chef participants completed surveys before and after taking part in the program.

Comparison of results indicated a change in the food the teens consumed and more involvement with food preparation in their families:

- Pre-program, 85% reported not having eaten any fresh fruit the previous day, versus 12% after the program.
- Pre-program, 54% had not eaten any dark green leafy vegetable the previous day, versus 24% after the program.
- The teens reported helping out more with shopping and cooking at home. Before the program, 12% helped out three to seven times a week, while after the program, 63% did.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

Project staff members have shared their work and materials developed with Just Food, an organization that helps start community-based farmers' markets in low-income areas. They also are part of a network of Bronx markets that meets regularly to share findings and ideas.

THE FUTURE

Phipps Community Development Corporation is pursuing funding to expand community gardens in other Bronx neighborhoods. In a report to the Foundation, the Project Director writes, "Drew Gardens and the farmers' market have become an inspiration for change in West Farms."