AROUND THE CORNER TO BETTER HEALTH: a 2-year project aimed at improving access to healthy food at four urban corner stores

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OVERVIEW

- 2-year project, $200,000

- Funded by the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program (HWPP) from the Medical College of Wisconsin

- Community Academic Partnership
  - Walnut Way Conservation Corp
  - Medical College of Wisconsin
  - Milwaukee Health Department
**GOAL:**

- Improve store **infrastructure** to support stores’ abilities to stock fresh food (e.g., the purchase of coolers for storage/sale of fresh produce)

- Targeted **marketing** efforts to increase sales of produce in the stores

- Improved access to **distribution** channels which offer affordable locally grown produce

- Helping store owners **navigate** complicated city/state regulatory guidelines
COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECT COORDINATOR

- Community-based project coordinator
  - Worked for Walnut Way
  - .50 FTE (20 hours per week)
  - Conducted food sampling at neighborhood activities and within corner stores
EVALUATION/GRANT MANAGEMENT TEAM

- Monthly meetings
- Evaluation
- Dissemination
- Program implementation
CORNER STORE OWNERS

- Five stores
- Small stores (1,000 to 3,300 square feet)
- Small staffs
- Attended coalition meetings (bi-monthly)
- Worked actively with Project Coordinator to implement project activities
Diverse coalition of community partners who provided insights related to many topics:

- Food access
- Business strategies
- Project activities
- Marketing
- Distribution
Pre- and post-project interviews with store owners provided an understanding of the owners’ attitudes and practices related to stocking and selling healthy foods, especially fresh produce.
Measuring Success – Store Owner Feedback

What affects sale of produce?
- Adequate refrigeration
- Consumer demand
- Marketing
- Prices
- Equipment (coolers, kitchens, sinks)
Measuring Success – Store Owner Feedback

Benefits of the project:
- Store redesign
- Fresh produce signage
- In-store cooking demonstrations
- Support from project staff
- Business development resources
- Skills in storing/displaying produce
- Connecting with community
- Gaining customers
- Customers’ increased knowledge
Measuring Success – Store Owner Feedback

Challenges/suggestions for improving healthy food access:

- Increase marketing in the neighborhood
- Improve coordination with local sources for food (e.g., community gardens)
- Increase technical assistance from the health department
- Improve store access to produce
- Assistance maintaining storage coolers
- Ensuring stores can process WIC payments for produce
Measuring Success – Store Owner Feedback

Future Plans

- Change furniture/equipment to accommodate and sell more produce

- Outdoor summer events to promote healthy foods

- Increased presence of owners in the stores’ kitchen areas
Youth Food Justice Series

- 6-week youth centered cooking and educational program
- Focused on developing young leaders to be agents of change
- Youth are taught:
  - Leadership and culinary skills to conduct food demonstrations/samplings in neighborhood
- Program intended to complement existing youth programs in the neighborhood which are engaging youth in urban gardening and related food justice activities.
YOUTH FOOD JUSTICE SERIES

Did You Like Today's Session?
Did You Understand the Topic?
Person Talking or Teaching
Would You Use This at Home?
PRODUCE SALES

- Bi-weekly photos of store produce inventory and brief discussions with store owners to assess how well produce was selling
CONSUMER SURVEY

- Neighborhood residents completed a survey related to produce buying habits in corner stores
  - High prices and lack of freshness cited as reasons why people did not purchase produce from corner stores
  - 40% shop at the corner store at least 4 times per week
  - 33% had a household of 5 or more people
  - 91% ate fresh fruit and vegetables
  - 47% were women
  - 63% were under age 40
Lessons Learned

1. Offering fresh, minimally processed produce requires an understanding of complicated city codes related to weights & measures, labeling, pricing

2. Partnering store owners are not in a position to make investment in the façades of stores since they are not building owners; building owners were often unwilling to make façade changes for fear of increased property taxes.
LESSONS LEARNED

3. Provision of healthy food requires commitment of additional time and resources into training of staff; most staff members in the partnering stores do not have food prep skills needed to offer healthy foods.

4. As the liaison to the store owners, the project coordinator shouldered a great deal of responsibility. It is challenging to accomplish the project objectives and resolve complicated issues in only 20 hours each week.
QUESTIONS/COMMENTS