

Farm Fresh: Healthy Food Access at Bowdoin Street Health Center

The Problem

Rates of overweight/obesity and diet-related disease are higher in Bowdoin Street Health Center's catchment area than in Boston overall. 58% percent of adults in North Dorchester are overweight or obese, as compared to 47% in Boston. 8% percent of North Dorchester adults have diabetes and 22% have hypertension, both of which are higher than the city-wide average.

Residents of the neighborhood surrounding Bowdoin Street Health Center have expressed interest in increasing access to healthy food as a means of combating these health inequalities and improving quality of life for community members and health center patients. Bowdoin Street Health Center worked with residents to develop a healthy food access plan that started with the founding of the Bowdoin Geneva Farmers' Market in 2008.

Aim/Goal

To increase access to healthy, affordable food for Bowdoin Street Health Center patients and neighborhood residents by:

1. Increasing attendance, sales, and usage of the Boston Bounty Bucks program (a discount program for food stamp recipients) at the Bowdoin Geneva Farmers' Market.
2. Piloting a subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.
3. Beginning implementation of a Healthy Corner Store Initiative to increase the availability of produce and other healthy items in local corner stores.

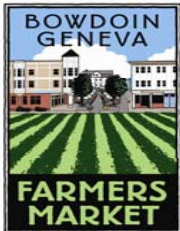
The Team

- Jen French, Community Health & Wellness Coach
- Philly Laptiste, Operations Manager, Practice and Community Health
- Adela Margules, Executive Director
- Melissa Moore-Boyle, MS, RD, LDN, CDE, Clinical Dietitian
- Cathy Wirth, Healthy Food Access Coordinator
- The Food Project
- Bowdoin Geneva Food in the Hood Neighborhood Committee

The Interventions

- Brought together a team of consultants, health center staff, partner organizations and community members to develop a multi-year Healthy Food Access Strategic Plan.
- Conducted an expanded farmers' market promotions campaign. Campaign included community workshops and outreach, coupon distribution, development and distribution of promotional materials, social media, and special events at the market.
- Implemented a system to track weekly farmers' market attendance and sales.
- Started a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to increase market sales and provide subsidized shares of fresh produce to local residents. Twenty BIDMC staff purchased full-price CSA shares at \$25/week. These full-priced shares helped make subsidized shares available to ten families in the community for \$5/week.
- Hired neighborhood youth and worked with local partners to conduct 89 consumer surveys and two corner store inventories that will inform implementation of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. Presented results of surveys in a community forum at the health center.

The Results/Progress to Date

	2009	2010	% Change
 Avg. Weekly Attendance	65	124	+90%
Total Market Sales	\$4,740	\$15,308	+223%
Total Boston Bounty Bucks Sales	\$485	\$1,585	+227%



Contents of a weekly share

Over the ten weeks of the pilot CSA program, the group of families that purchased subsidized shares received almost \$2,000 worth of produce. Feedback on the shares was very positive from both full-price and subsidized share recipients, and there is strong interest in expanding the program next year.

"Everything was fresh & sabi (Creole for very good), especially all the kinds of corn. I hope they continue it next year, it was an excellent program. I didn't let anything go to waste!"
-Subsidized share recipient

Lessons Learned

- Despite increased farmers' market sales and attendance in 2010, there is not currently sufficient demand and purchasing power to maintain a financially sustainable farmers' market in the Bowdoin Street Health Center neighborhood through market sales alone. In order to sustain the farmers' market long-term, there will need to be continued efforts to increase attendance and sales, along with more creative means of financing and planning. This may take the form of grants, special initiatives like the CSA program, and/or partnerships with non-profit farms that are willing to attend the market for mission-based reasons rather than profits.
- Farmers' markets are just one outlet for increasing access to fresh produce. The CSA program and Healthy Corner Store Initiative represent exciting opportunities to make healthy food available to a wider segment of Bowdoin Street Health Center's patients and neighbors.

Next Steps

- Continue to grow the Bowdoin Geneva Farmers' Market, and further increase sales and attendance in 2011.
- Build on relationships with local farmers to expand the CSA program in 2011, offering more full-price shares at BIDMC and subsidized shares in the Bowdoin Geneva neighborhood.
- Continue with implementation of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, selecting a pilot store and beginning efforts to increase availability and sales of healthy items in that store. Pilot sales of produce from local farmers in Bowdoin Geneva corner stores.



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