

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center

BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS, GROCERIES, GARDENS AND MARKETS

Two years ago, Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (BNHC) opened a new site with a teaching kitchen. Just next door, Vicente's Market opened a new grocery store. A collaboration to reduce food insecurity flourished as they shared resources.

Vicente's is a well-known market that caters to Cape Verdean immigrants but also has a wide variety of foods that are part of the diets of the health center's diverse cultural groups. BNHC is an urban clinic with a long history of addressing food insecurity through food vouchers, public programs and charitable partnerships.

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center partners with a statewide program, a local grocer, a college and hospitals to comprehensively fight hunger.

One of those partnerships is Project Bread, a statewide coalition that raises funds to help area organizations meet the food security needs of their communities. BNHC

has participated with Project Bread for 13 years, receiving funds on an annual basis.

Providers refer patients to a social worker who determines their needs and links them with community resources. Food vouchers are given to meet immediate hunger needs and can be spent at Vicente's. Vicente's gives store credit for healthy choices and displays nutritional content of foods. Sample recipes are shared using products

from the store cooked in BNHC's teaching kitchen. Funds also allow the purchase of several Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions. The produce is brought to the center and used in the kitchen as well as given away.

Alexandra Avedisian, Community Health Program Manager, leads the food security initiatives. She says the key to success is using community health workers (CHWs). Trained in health promotion and case management, they represent the distinct cultural communities of the patients. As one CHW put it, "We work with, not for, the patients."

Stonehill College is another partner to BNHC. It has a campus farm, and the manager brings produce from that farm to sell at BNHC during the summer months. This mobile market supplies fresh produce at low cost to patients at the center. Some of the patients also receive vouchers from Project Bread monies to assist their purchases. Patients learn about foods they might not find familiar and enjoy learning from the Stonehill manager. This mobile market plans to expand to a public housing site that BNHC serves.

Avedisian has a word of caution. A hospital partner wanted to double their vouchers because they recognized BNHC's good work. However, that strained the capacity of the CHWs in other areas. Sometimes you have to limit even successful ideas until funding supports infrastructure.



GARDENS AS THERAPY

In the course of assisting women with depression, Ginger, a Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (BNHC) social worker, realized the center’s Ecuadorean women immigrants all shared a common longing. They missed farming the land and contributing food to their family’s table. Ginger got permission to use some of the land associated with Vicente’s Market as a garden plot and a group therapy project was sown in that soil.

Groundbreaking was on a wet rainy Sunday in April. Women not only came, but brought their young children dressed in Sunday suits. The work became a celebration. An elderly woman lent a hand from her wheelchair, eager to do her part.

Every Friday they met, working for an hour in the garden and then gathering in group therapy in the teaching kitchen. Harvests were plentiful, with food brought home weekly to the women’s families. When the weather turned dry, members of the group showed up during the week to water and tend the plants.

It may not be Ecuador, but these women have a new sense of home and land. Strong community bonds are forming along with a sense of purpose and pride. Mental health needs are met with physical health activities and new opportunities for work. The center hopes to replicate this idea in the coming years.

INTERVENTIONS

**A TEACHING KITCHEN WITH CLASSES
IN COOKING AND NUTRITION**

**A LOCAL GROCERY STORE
PARTNERSHIP FOR FOOD VOUCHERS
AND NUTRITION EDUCATION**

**LEVERAGING SERVICES THROUGH
THE PROJECT BREAD COALITION**

**A COMMUNITY GARDEN
AND THERAPY PROGRAM**

**PARTNERSHIPS
FOR FOOD DONATIONS**

**A MOBILE FOOD MARKET FOR
LOW-COST PRODUCE IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE LOCAL COLLEGE**

**HIRING A COMMUNITY HEALTH
PROGRAM MANAGER TO LEAD
FOOD SECURITY EFFORTS WITH TRAINED
COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS**

PARTNERS

FALLON HEALTH INSURANCE

PROJECT BREAD

STONEHILL COLLEGE

VICENTE’S GROCERY