

Family Resource Centers

Their Impact on Community Health Issues

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Submitted by:
Judi Sherman, MA, Ed.
Judi Sherman & Associates

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Barbara McCullough, Brighter Beginnings, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties
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Rachelle Modena, Shasta County Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council
Jeneba Lahai and Katie Villegas, Yolo County Children's Alliance

Edited by: Cindy Kunisaki

Family Resource Centers and Their Impact on Community Health Issues

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, a selected number of Family Resource Centers (FRC) from across California were granted the opportunity to partner with the California Family Resource Association (CFRA) on The California Endowment's initiative *Health Happens Here*. The primary outcomes of this partnership were to 1) foster a dynamic understanding of health for FRC staff, program participants, community residents, policy makers, and other partner and government agencies and 2) to embed the Health Happens Here message in FRC daily practice.

This report first provides a general description of FRCs and illustrates how their programs and activities have engendered community trust which makes them natural partners to promote health messages. Then five case studies are included that describe examples of how each FRC impacts the root causes of local health issues, how they mobilize and engage the people who live in the conditions they are trying to change, and the outcomes of their work.

WHY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS?

Family Resource Centers are well positioned to promote the Health Happens Here message to spark interest and action to address health disparities by raising awareness of the issues, building partnerships, organizing residents to advocate for change, and implementing social media strategies. FRCs are characterized by a commitment to work in partnership with local residents, including the beneficiaries of services, and to strengthen families and build strong, healthy communities. FRCs are located in the community or neighborhood that they serve, and are the hub of prevention and early intervention activities designed to improve the lives of all residents of that community. FRCs act as catalysts to support local efforts that connect all facets of the community to promote health and well-being using a variety of strategies to educate and engage.

Many FRCs pursue a dual role of providing direct services to individuals and families and promoting activities that address the root causes of conditions in which residents live. Services may include, case management, parent education, home visitation, and links to county resources and programs. FRCs engage in activities that may include ensuring access to health insurance and services, advocating for affordable housing, promoting family economic success, and increasing availability of healthy foods. However, FRCs do more than provide or connect people to services. They provide opportunities for social connections to reduce isolation. They help develop skills and knowledge so that families can prevent and address future challenges. They address societal inequities by helping to focus on social and physical neighborhood conditions, and by unmuting the voice of marginalized residents. FRCs help people have access to government and business, and to have a say in their children's education.

FRCs do not work in isolation. They partner with schools, libraries, funders, neighborhood organizations, businesses, and state and local government to disseminate key messages to change individual behaviors and community norms. These partnerships ensure service provision for families across a spectrum of need, including targeted efforts to serve particular populations. They offer educational opportunities on a variety of topics like

parent education, good nutrition, and leadership development. FRCs work with local and state legislators to increase the visibility of local conditions and impact policy to promote change.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FIVE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

The five FRCs highlighted here are long established sites that welcome everyone and have built the trust required to connect with populations of people in need of equal access opportunities. Their programming is designed to be culturally responsive, accommodate schedules, address the need for childcare in order for adults to participate, and many other considerations that transmit the message to participants that their voices and contributions are important and their lives are valued. This trust is foundational to attracting people to learn new skills and to become civically engaged. In addition, these FRCs have created partnerships with local government and have effectively brought together those who want change with key decision-makers. By mobilizing partnerships across sectors, FRCs have promoted a common language to effect change.

Contributing to an initiative like Health Happens Here requires program participants and other residents to act as local community leaders to promote the health-based message, advocate with schools and local and state government, and organize their peers and other residents to participate. One of the common themes that emerged from the case studies is that growing participant leaders is a relational effort. While curriculum-based training is important for the acquisition of knowledge skills, it is clear from FRC stories that new leaders benefit from mentoring, encouragement and guidance. It often takes dedicated staff with the ability to create a safe environment for learning and to create opportunities for emerging leaders to explore strategy and issues in a peer-to-peer environment. Definitions about what it takes to be a leader may vary from culture to culture, requiring sensitivity to differences in language and traditions. FRCs are well-positioned to engage the families in their neighborhoods, build trust and draw out their passion to mobilize leaders for long-term change.

Brighter Beginnings

Contra Costa and Alameda Counties

An Integrated Approach to Financial Literacy with the Power of the Health Happens Here Message

Brighter Beginnings, a Family Resource Center serving Contra Costa and Alameda counties, began their work in 1984 in response to the differences in mortality and illness rates among African American babies in comparison to other races and ethnicities. They have since expanded to six locations and offer a wide array of comprehensive programs in the areas of teen family services, family health, early childhood education, and community engagement. These have all been guided by the social determinants of health and the Strengthening Families framework.

Brighter Beginnings opened two primary health care clinics during the past two years, enhancing their ability to integrate medical care with social programs, and to remove barriers to access medical care for program participants. In their work at the clinics, health care providers found that anxiety and stress, along with diabetes and obesity, are common consequences of the social conditions that their patients face every day. Across all Brighter Beginnings' programs, participants' stress and anxiety are exacerbated due to limited access to living wage jobs and the struggle to care of their families.

The United States Census Bureau shows that, between 2003 and 2013, poverty rates in Contra Costa and Alameda counties have risen 3% and almost 2% respectively while the median income has increased in both counties.¹ It has been shown that families with more financial stability are healthier and live longer, and income inequality is one of the major barriers to health. Brighter Beginnings incorporates financial education into all of their family strengthening programs and workshops, offering access to income tax assistance and working with partners to increase access to occupational education.

Financial literacy begins by training staff in coaching techniques that they apply to their case management activities. Staff coaches help program participants identify individual and family needs and goals, and explore root causes and barriers they may face. This discussion often leads to a shared understanding that many goals can be reached through financial planning and utilizing appropriate financial institutions. Brighter Beginnings offers workshops that cover banking basics, setting a budget, understanding credit, and creating a financial action plan. Individuals benefit from one-on-one coaching and the ability to access trained financial staff to address immediate financial needs and build financially secure futures.

Brighter Beginnings also provides the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) to help families manage their incomes. In 2014, working families in Richmond and Antioch earned a total of \$805,773 in returns through the Earned Income Tax, Child Tax, Education, and other credits.

The results of these efforts speak for themselves. After completing the six-week financial education course, 100% of the Brighter Beginnings participants did not obtain often-used high interest payday loans to help them between paychecks. Sixty-four percent opened a new savings account, 92% paid no late fees and none paid a check-cashing fee, which was down by 32%. These results illustrate that participants are establishing healthy financial habits that advance their individual and family goals.

¹ "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 1997-2013," United States Census Bureau,,
<http://www.census.gov/did/www/saipe/data/interactive/saipe.html?s_appName=saipe&map_yearSelector=2013&map_geoSelector=mhi_c&s_state=06&s_county=06013,06001&s_measures=aa_snc&menu=trends>

Brighter Beginnings is naturally aligned with the Health Happens Here campaign through its programmatic approach to education and engagement. Staff has been trained to implement promotional messaging and to envision the engagement of families and community members. Materials have been developed to disseminate the health message at each of the seven program sites. Parent Café topics focused on presenting the message to generate action towards improving healthy behaviors. The campaign continues to dynamically provoke people to think about what “health” means and what it would take to assert that positive opportunities are available throughout neighborhoods and the community.

According to Barbara McCullough, CEO of Brighter Beginnings, the biggest impact of the Health Happens Here campaign is that it helped the organization transition to a new level of intentional dissemination of a specific message. They have been able to use the health message to promote their own approach to service integration, as well as connect Family Resource Center programming and goals to a specific health message. At this initial stage, there has been no formal evaluation, but in the one year since the beginning of the initiative, Ms. McCullough has observed an increased community awareness of FRCs and health care centers.

While this early exposure has been effective, Brighter Beginnings is moving forward to promote higher visibility activities that are more targeted, such as the campaign to reduce soda consumption. In addition, Brighter Beginnings is planning to develop a regional advisory committee, as well as enhancing a youth intervention network to focus on education outcomes by reducing truancy. The FRC’s foundational approach of connecting people, observing and growing local leaders, and building trust is proving to be a successful match with the Health Happens Here vision.

**El Modena Family Resource Center
Orange County
*Addressing Health Disparities through Inclusion and Leadership Development***

El Modena Family Resource Center of Orange County takes a whole family approach to health and wellness. This FRC offers an array of services, education and activities that span the ages, from classes on healthy pregnancy and birth, health education for teens, to blood pressure monitoring and diabetes care for seniors. Through these efforts, common themes arise for all age groups including obesity and access to healthy food options.

The El Modena neighborhood is reflective of the health disparities evident across Orange County. While the county ranks as the sixth healthiest in California, closer assessment reveals differences that exist among different populations.² According to the 2014-2016 Orange County Health Improvement Plan, almost one in four adults is obese and only a little over half of fifth graders have healthy body composition. Fewer adults are getting the recommended amount of exercise and fruits and vegetables in their diets. In addition, Latina females account for almost 40% of adult obesity.³

Four years ago, The El Modena FRC established a group of parent leaders as a result of funding from Orange County Families and Children Together (FaCT). The 15-20 core members of this group had formed a walking club in their neighborhood to address the issues of obesity and diabetes as well as to increase their social connections. El Modena has incorporated nutrition education as part of the group's activities and provides support to the group to continue a healthy lifestyle. In turn, group members began to volunteer at the FRC, and eventually the group grew to become the Community Engagement Advisory Committee with the encouragement and training provided at the FRC.

This leadership group now initiates various projects independently with staff support and encouragement. For example, some parents noticed that children who participated in the karate martial arts program at the FRC were healthier than their peers, drank more water, were more disciplined, and improved their grade point averages. The parents wanted to support the program and began to raise funds to ensure that the program continued. The FRC provided guidance and training on fundraising, and the parents accomplished the rest.

The individuals in this group went through a developmental process of acting as agency volunteers and then as activists organizing to make change in their neighborhood. The concepts and language of leadership take time to become internalized. In addition to offering leadership training, the FRC staff continuously remind the group of the skills and power possessed by each person individually, and by the group together as a whole. Now, the group has begun to embrace their role as community leaders involved in civic engagement activities with such actions as reaching out to the mini-market owners to request healthier food for a neighborhood where healthy food options are limited or unavailable.

Another action initiated by this group began as a result of their participation in the Health Happens Here campaign. These developing leaders started walking a new route in a part of El Modena where there is a park. They noted that the park was not appropriately lighted and, with the time change, the park was too dark to use safely. The group decided to advocate for more lighting for the park through local government and policy makers. They recognize that this kind of change can take time and have made a long-term commitment to achieve their goal. This illustrates how residents can take action to ensure neighborhood safety, and

² "Orange County Health Improvement Plan 2014-16," County of Orange, Health Care Agency, Public Health Services. May 2014, <<http://ochealthinfo.com/about/admin/pubs/OCHealthImprovementPlan>>

³ Ibid. Page 23.

demonstrates how individuals gain a sense of self-efficacy, that in turn is one of the primary determinants of health and longer life.

One notable result from the Health Happens Here campaign was the ability of the Walking Club members to visualize dreams for their neighborhood, and to begin developing a strategy to realize that vision. As the members strolled through a more “middle class” neighborhood, they began to ask themselves what were the differences with their own neighborhood. They noticed that there was no graffiti, nor were there people hanging out on street corners. Maribel Reyes, manager of the El Modena FRC, reflected back to the group that the changes they wish to see in their neighborhood are attainable, and that the Walking Club members themselves can change what they see as normal for their neighborhood.

The impact of the group’s attention became evident. Since the group started walking over a year ago, they noticed that the graffiti was reduced. Ms. Reyes suspects that once community members realized that there was a regular group of 10-15 people walking through the neighborhood, the taggers and graffiti vandals may have left the area. The presence of the walking club seemed to reduce the graffiti and it has remained clean for several months.

The El Modena neighborhood includes a high percentage of residents who are undocumented and whose health care access is limited. Many of these adults postpone health care until their condition is advanced. The FRC is trying to change this behavior to encourage people to focus on preventive care and to deliver the message that regardless of status or background, each community member has control over his or her own health. El Modena offers classes on nutrition and wellness, linking behavioral choices to health consequences. Through the FRC’s Peer-to-Peer program, former program participants teach classes that inform all attendees that choices about what they eat and drink have a direct impact on their health. Participants are offered a “garden kit” to take home to begin growing their own healthy foods. The FRC message promotes that everyone has the power to take control over their own health, even with medical conditions or limited availability of care.

El Modena has taken its inclusive approach to engaging youth and families further by opening participation in the Community Engagement Advisory Committee. The FRC recognizes that it is important that the advisory group is reflective of the neighborhood as a whole, and encourages representation from all programs including seniors, youth, and pregnant moms. Once engaged, the representatives take information back to the different programs. For example, youth program members participated in a forum to spread the Health Happens Here message and exhibited photos of their neighborhood taken during a “PhotoVoice” project. They identified areas as “healthy” and “needs improvement” and offered solutions for positive change on which they will focus in the near future. The message to the residents is that everyone’s voice is important and everyone has something to contribute.

El Modena FRC is currently moving forward to increase youth and male involvement in all of their programs. The staff utilizes their successful model of targeted outreach and engagement that includes asking people for their ideas and input, as opposed to establishing programming by staff only. El Modena creates the space for leaders to emerge, and establishes the certainty and security that given the opportunity for action, change will happen.

**The Pasadena/Altadena Coalition of Transformative Leaders (PACTL)
Los Angeles County**

Promoting Community Health and Well-being through Networks and Partnerships

The Coalition of Transformative Leaders joined together over ten years ago to build bridges with the Pasadena and Altadena communities by supporting schools and partnering with local and state government representatives, law enforcement, and families. In 2010, PACTL was incorporated with the goal of generating community transformation by building on existing services and community resources.

PACTL promotes community health and well-being through direct services, partnerships, and cultivating networks of parents, teen parents and youth. *The Parent/Youth Networks* connect PACTL to the community through a mutual relationship of support and feedback. PACTL works with its *Parent/Youth Networks* to conduct needs assessments, hold focus groups, solicit community feedback, provide training, and offer opportunities to join PACTL events.

PACTL's core programs include Family Life Education which emphasizes community health and well-being, classes in the areas of nutrition, physical and behavioral health, child development, goal setting, and family roles in cultivating and celebrating traditions. PACTL's focus on advocacy provides cross-generational and cross-sector platforms to address issues related to individual and community well-being and child abuse prevention.

Since its inception, PACTL has formed partnerships with both county and local public health agencies. These working relationships are characterized by sharing best practices and technical assistance, co-location and facilities use, referrals, community identified needs assessments, and inclusion in PACTL's biennial summit. The partners share mutual focus areas of obesity reduction, increased knowledge of nutrition, and improved access to healthy food.

Obesity is an issue throughout many of the communities served by PACTL. Twenty-four percent of residents in the San Gabriel Valley are obese.⁴ Many neighborhoods of low-income residents have an abundance of fast food venues and convenience stores, but lack healthy food options.⁵ This contributes to the cycle of obesity along with lack of knowledge about healthy foods and the importance of physical activity to maintain good health.

PACTL promotes change in these conditions by cultivating relationships with families and building on the strength of their cultures. They focus mostly on Latino and African American families to educate about healthy eating habits and the value of physical activity, and how to build on and reconnect with their culture of origin to inform their choices. Rather than try to change what people eat, PACTL offers nutrition education classes and cooking demonstrations for families to help people find ways to prepare the food of their culture in different ways. For example, people make wraps with tortillas rather than frying them to make a taco. According to Yolanda Trevino, PACTL Executive Director, people are more likely to continue healthy eating habits with familiar foods.

"Soda consumption has become a regular part of the Latino diet to the degree that people give cola from the bottle to babies," says Trevino. PACTL responded to this by conducting a media campaign to replace sodas with "aguas frescas" which are fruit and vegetable flavored water that has been a part of the Latino culture for generations. The approach is multi-cultural and multi-generational in order to infuse the message throughout

⁴ "Service Planning Area 3," County of Los Angeles Public Health, Community Health Services, , <<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/CHS/SPA3/index.htm>>

⁵ "Community Health Assessment2015." Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/plan/docs/CHA_CHIP/LACDPHCommunityHealthAssessment2015.pdf>

the family culture. Particularly in the Latino culture, it is critical to include the grandmother, parents, and children in activities so that all participate and contribute to the change in habits together. Change can only be sustained by engaging each essential member of the family.

While families want to eat well, healthy food is often not accessible or may be too expensive. Through the Health Happens Here campaign, PACTL responded to these conditions by starting the Champions for Healthy Families (CHF) program. The program promotes individual behavior change by providing role-models for healthy behavior like walking and eating nutritious food, spreading the message at community fairs, and advocating for public policy changes that promote health and wellness.

As part of their efforts to impact individual and community health, the CHF program taught community members how to create container gardens at home and how to grow healthy foods using drought resistant approaches to conserve water. In addition, CHF promoted Saturday walks and invited experts along to identify nutritional and medicinal plants and their uses. Neighbors met one another, established social connections, and through discovery, became reconnected to the environment. After the walks, participants made salads or meals with food they harvested, and shared stories of their heritage while making connections to healthy habits and cultural traditions.

PACTL helps to reinforce these experiences through reciprocity by providing opportunities for people to pass on to others what they've learned. For example, the PACTL families, including The Parent/Youth Network, prepare the food for the agency's biennial Community Education Summit and dinner dance. In addition, The Parent/Youth Network meets regularly twice a month and members are able to showcase their culinary skills for the group. In the future, they plan to develop kitchen incubators to start a local catering business with healthy food and natural ingredients.

The success of Champions for Healthy Families is grounded in PACTL's strength and ability to engage residents and convene other agency partners in classes and events that reinforce cultural traditions. Over 1000 people were exposed to the Health Happens Here message through nutrition classes, the Educational Summit, community fairs and through partnerships with the Health Department, school district, and City Parks and Recreation. In addition, thirty-eight professionals and fifteen agencies learned about the Health Happens Here message as it relates to the science of brain development at the Child Welfare Roundtable. The Health Happens Here promotional campaign reached over 600 people with social media, circulating emails, handing out campaign cards at neighborhood events, and keeping a blog.

PACTL advocates presented at the Pasadena City Council to speak on behalf of retaining the Health Department's Prenatal Program and were recognized by the mayor of Pasadena for their effort and success. They also organized a welcome reception for the newly elected Mayor of Pasadena. As a result of these activities, parents who were never before involved with politicians now have a direct connection to the mayor.

PACTL's ongoing work to engage families in change efforts is complemented with its partnerships with many agencies with a health focus as well as maintaining connections with local leaders, networks and professional groups. Their multi-directional efforts act as bridges between residents and public and private agencies to promote change for individuals and institutions in the quest for healthier communities.

Shasta Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council
Shasta County
Linking Adverse Childhood Experiences with Community and Family Health

Since its inception in 1987, the Shasta County Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council (CAPCC) has worked to promote a local culture that values all children and families. Using a variety of strategies, the CAPCC disseminates public information, provides education, and promotes professional development regarding child abuse and neglect and its prevention. Through its Family Resource Center, CAPCC offers services, activities, and support to strengthen communities and families, and advocates for the improvement and expansion of quality services through partnerships with local collaboratives, public health and social service agencies, and businesses.

The CAPCC's primary strategy is to improve long term community health outcomes and the immediate well-being of children and families by addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These early experiences that effect adult behavior and health can include chronic disease, absence of health care and healthy behaviors, household substance abuse and/or physical abuse, household mental illness, and other family dysfunction or stressful childhood experience. A 2012 survey conducted with Shasta County residents between the ages of 18 and 64 showed significantly higher ACE scores than those revealed in a national survey conducted in 2009.⁶ For example, 29% of the Shasta County respondents reported five or more ACEs compared to 9% in other states. Conversely, only 16% of county residents reported having no ACEs while over 40% reported having no ACEs elsewhere.

The CAPCC takes a dual approach to teach its participants and the public about ACEs and how childhood trauma can lead to lifelong health issues. First, they educate the parent community that conditions in which children are raised have a long term impact. Shasta County has a child abuse rate of 12.4 per 1,000 children, compared to 8.7 per 1,000 children statewide.⁷ In light of these kinds of statistics, the CAPCC also promotes education for community leaders and policy makers to help them understand the implications of ACEs and what that means for the health of the county.

Utilizing the *Parent Cafés* model at the Shasta County FRC, parents learn to build on the 5 Protective Factors to decrease ACEs. The 5 Protective Factors have been shown to protect against child abuse and neglect and to promote optimal child development.⁸ Parents and primary caregivers gather in small groups to explore topics related to raising healthy children including managing stress, communicating in positive ways, and creating safe environments. *The Parent Cafés* provide an intimate, personal place for parents and caregivers to share concerns and gain new insights.

The FRC also manages two *Parent Partner Programs*, one of which connects families to pre-schools and another that supports families who have been referred to the child welfare system and do not have open cases. Both programs are staffed by paraprofessionals who are knowledgeable about Shasta County agencies and resources and who help make the connection between increasing protective factors while reducing ACEs.

The CAPCC has a history of delivering strong and persuasive messages in Shasta County about the connection between ACEs and community health. In 2013, the CAPCC promoted Child Abuse Prevention Month by partnering with local businesses to help them support their employees' families and the families that visit their

⁶ "Local ACE Study – Data & Statistics," Shasta Strengthening Families, <<http://www.shastastrongfamilies.org/data-statistics/>>

⁷ "Shasta County Summary," Kidsdata.org, Lucille Packard Foundation for Children's Health, <<http://www.kidsdata.org/region/326/shasta-county/summary#1/child-and-youth-safety>>

⁸ "Strengthening Families: A Protective Factors Framework," Center of the Study of Social Policy, <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies>

businesses. This partnership focused on how to redirect negative parent/child interactions while being positive and supportive. They developed a radio commercial, print ads, posters, Facebook ads, and training for parents of the 20 participating businesses. This campaign, called *“Strengthening Families is Everybody’s Business”* reached more than 12,000 families.

Through the Health Happens Here campaign, the CAPCC reached out to parents, Shasta County Public Health, the Shasta County Public Library, and Healthy Shasta, a health focused leadership collaborative. They implemented a variety of marketing approaches to educate and inform a diverse audience about the impact of ACEs on community health.

In April 2015, as part of Child Abuse Prevention month, the CAPCC promoted *“Pinwheel Gardens of Hope”* across Shasta County. They invited elected officials, community leaders, business owners, families, and individuals to plant a “garden” of blue pinwheels, a national symbol used to bring awareness to child abuse prevention. The gardens reflect the efforts of the community to support and nurture families from the early years to ensure strong families, free from abuse.

Gardens were planted in three cities in the county. During the planting of the gardens, Rachelle Modena, CAPCC Executive Director, took the opportunity to speak about making the connection between healthy families and reducing ACEs, and how ACEs in turn impact everyone in the local community. Businesses hosted gardens and put signs in their landscaping. Families adopted sixty pinwheel garden kits to plant in neighborhoods throughout the county, and ten gardens were planted at local schools. Ms. Modena estimates that 50,000 people were reached through this messaging.

While it is early to evaluate the reduction in ACEs as a result of this messaging, the CAPCC is able to measure the impact of its work based on the number of supporters it has gained over the past year. For example, the CAPCC holds a fundraising event every year in April for Child Abuse Prevention Month. The *“Tri-Tip BBQ”* event brings support from over 50 businesses and partner agencies, raising significant donations for the agency. The number of sandwiches sold doubled this year as compared to 2014. Ms. Modena affirms that this kind of turnout demonstrates that the message is resonating beyond the FRC and is gaining the visibility that is needed to promote a culture that cherishes children and families.

West Sacramento Family Resource Center
Yolo County
Youth and Adult Leaders Promote Healthy Lives and a Safe Community

The West Sacramento Family Resource Center opened in 2010 as a program of the Yolo County Children’s Alliance (YCCA), an umbrella nonprofit for agencies that serve children and families in Yolo County. The FRC’s major health focus is to ensure the all residents have access to health insurance and are “health literate,” meaning that they have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. In addition, the FRC and the wider initiative work strategically with resident leaders and local partners to transform neighborhoods to ensure that options exist for healthy nutrition and safe, physical activity.

West Sacramento is an extremely diverse community comprised of people of various ethnic, racial, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. Many families are low income, medically underserved and live in areas where access to healthy food and safe streets is limited. The 2013 Woodland Healthcare Community Needs Assessment Survey identified West Sacramento as a place where the abundance of fast food outlets contributed to the problem of poor nutrition, and where residents feel unsafe engaging in physical activity outdoors. It reported that approximately 24% of residents were obese and 34% overweight. Further, it stated that 31% of West Sacramento residents lacked health insurance and needed access to primary and preventative health, dental and behavioral health services, health and nutrition education, and safe places to be active.⁹

The presence of the FRC in West Sacramento has helped to change residents’ perception and access to health services, particularly for limited English speakers and hard to reach populations. According to Katie Villegas, Executive Director of the YCCA, 97% of children zero to five are now enrolled in comprehensive health insurance like Medi-Cal, Kaiser Child Health Plan, and Healthy Kids, and 25% of the adult population is on Medi-Cal. The FRC employs certified Medi-Cal Enrollment Assistors at each of their locations to conduct education, outreach, and enrollment. Residents can receive one-on-one coaching about the Affordable Care Act to learn how to access and utilize their medical insurance coverage.

Because the FRC is a trusted entity in the community, health advocates are able to conduct effective outreach to raise awareness about available coverage, provide information, and enroll residents in health care. Advocates physically go into neighborhoods through faith-based organizations, schools, and community colleges. They hold health fairs for employees at local businesses, attend the migrant worker center, and participate in other community events to promote health literacy. Jeneba Lahai, Health Programs Manager at the YCCA says, “We don’t wait for people to come to us. We go to them to engage them in services and activities at the FRC.”

Ms. Villegas described West Sacramento as a community surrounded by agriculture, but where none of the product was accessible to local residents. They were relegated to buy food from neighborhood convenience stores that did not stock fresh foods. In response, the YCCA and the FRC distributed ten pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to over 100 families each week, and then partnered with the Center for Land-based Learning, the City of West Sacramento and others to support the development of six urban farm stands throughout the city that are accessible to all residents.

⁹ “2013 Community Health Needs Assessment Summary Implementation Strategy and Community Benefit Plan,” Woodland Healthcare, <<http://www.dignityhealth.org/cm/media/documents/Woodland-Healthcare-IS.pdf>>

A major catalyst for this project was the Adult Promotores, community leaders willing to talk with family, friends, and other community members to promote healthy lifestyles and increase access to local resources. Promotores speak the language of the local residents, share the same culture, and are able to bridge the gap between the traditional culture and local practice and policy. They promote positive health outcomes by delivering critical health messages and connecting people to resources in a culturally sensitive way. FRC staff work closely with the Promotores to provide training and support on how to advocate for themselves.

Early in the planning, the Adult Promotores walked city planners through neighborhoods to describe what they experience from the resident perspective. They saw the limited access to healthy food and the conditions that make their streets unsafe to walk and play that are common roadblocks to healthy neighborhoods. Now, vacant lots have become small farms and young farmers are taught how to cultivate the land and sell their produce. Small farmers join the food distribution events to demonstrate how to prepare healthy meals and to donate fruits and vegetables from their harvest.

Based on the standard that healthy eating and exercise go hand-in-hand, the FRC and the YCCA recently worked with resident leaders on several projects to change the face of the neighborhood to create safe spaces to play. One such project, fostered by efforts of the Promotores, resulted in a new neighborhood park near a local school. Over 50 Spanish-speaking families from the community attended a meeting with a city council member and the school district superintendent. They advocated for a safe place for their children to play. A smaller group of the Promotores attended a city council meeting to present crime statistics for the neighborhood near the school and to demonstrate the need for a park for health and safety. The local FRC staff supported this community activism by providing interpretation, guiding advocacy efforts, securing funding, and helping direct the plan for the park.

The Youth Promotores project, supported by The California Endowment and the California Family Resource Association, was a first-time effort to engage youth in new and original ways. This project was designed to reach children, youth, parents, and seniors as four designated sectors of the West Sacramento community. Like the Adult Promotores, the youth who participated show interest and commitment to community health and in mobilizing people around community health issues.

As a result of the program, the Youth Promotores made connections with institutions and individuals that they would not otherwise encounter. For example, they met with the mayor and other county and city representatives, advocated to implement after school activities at the local youth center, and were the only youth group to participate in a Code for America¹⁰ nationwide survey of how citizens relate to their government. They became messengers to the community about how to access CalFresh and Medi-Cal, and distributed health information to over 2,000 students and other community members.

According to Ms. Lahai, the most significant effect of the program was that the students learned that they have a voice for change. The students were empowered to speak for themselves, their peers, and for the health of their community. The foundation for life-long habits of civic engagement for these students were established through opportunities to advocate, attending community events, promoting FRC programs, and sparking conversations about the social determinants of health.

¹⁰ Code for America is a nonprofit that bridges government and technology, < <http://www.codeforamerica.org/> >

The West Sacramento FRC's efforts to support the success of the Youth and Adult Promotores requires more than training and providing resources. It entails in-depth knowledge of the people who participate and their cultures, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds. It requires an understanding and realization that people of diverse backgrounds can contribute significantly to their neighborhoods and community. FRC staff embrace their role to inspire people, reflect back to them their strengths, help to build skills, mentor, guide, and encourage. This important work takes time and an authentic belief that everyone has something unique to contribute.