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Florida Blue Foundation

MISSION: Help people and communities achieve better health.

Forward to a friend

E-newsletter 18 - Part I | July-August 2014

In 2007 the Florida Blue Foundation launched a seven-year community engagement initiative called *Embrace a Healthy Florida*. It is still going strong today in six targeted communities led by six established organizations and engaged community coalitions in: Hialeah - the City of Hialeah; Jacksonville - Florida Department of Health in Duval County; Opa-locka - War on Poverty-Florida; Orlando/Parramore - Health Council of East Central Florida; Tallahassee - Florida A & M University and Community Partners; and Tampa/Sulphur Springs - Tampa Metropolitan YMCA. The purpose of this community engagement initiative is to address the causes of childhood obesity across the state and to prevent Florida's childhood obesity epidemic. It is about making changes that make a difference, like seeking ways to remove the very real barriers that stand between children's health, healthy food choices and physical activity.

Embrace a Healthy Florida was designed around seven strategies to evaluate the success of the Initiative in each community. Those success factors are: **1) targeted interventions with at-risk communities and low-income children, 2) increased access to healthy foods, 3) promote changes in parenting and families, 4) promote changes in child care or school settings, 5) promote changes in the environment, 6) address marketing and advertising practices, and 7) address health care providers and systems.** The Foundation has an external evaluator that is monitoring the Initiative's outcomes and metrics.

While there is still one year to go before the Initiative ends, there are reported successes/changes made against the seven success factors. The communities are leveraging the Foundation's dollars and the Foundation is now working with the communities on a "legacy" plan for each of the communities to ensure that the results in these communities as it relates to childhood obesity and the built environment live on well past the seven years of Foundation funding. This newsletter shares just some of our outcomes and we are proud of the communities for their successes. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the enewsletter.

Susan Towler,
Vice President, Florida Blue Foundation

Some of the *Embrace a Healthy Florida* Outcomes and Impacts

- All six communities targeted represent at-risk communities with larger populations of low-income children. These six communities have served 187,827 youth and 76,112 adults (total 262,939).
- Documented evidence of increased access to healthy food in areas designated as "food deserts" through renovations to corner grocery stores, creation of farmers markets, and development of 173 community and school gardens where there were none before. A total of 12,363 youth and adults participated in gardening activities between January and December 2013.
- Developed and implemented culturally appropriate nutrition education programs focused on healthy meals design, purchase and preparation to 64,995 youth and adults in all six communities. Families reported healthier eating, improved health (reduced BMI, HA1C, cholesterol and weight), and increased physical activity as families and individually.
- Community coalitions were successful in removing sugary beverages from all elementary schools and most child care centers in targeted areas.
- Nutrition and physical activity training provided to 57,000 workers, children and families at nearly 200 child care centers and after school program providers that resulted in changes to policies and practices to incorporate these healthy behaviors into the schools and centers.
- Worked with elected officials to advocate and gain support for the implementation of marked crosswalks on streets where children must cross busy roads to walk to and from school in three of the six communities.
- Worked with three cities, departments of transportation and counties to address safety issues. Results included crosswalks marked and signals installed; sidewalks and paths to schools repaired and debris and encroaching vegetation removed; 70 dilapidated homes removed and lots cleared, and more than 150 tons of debris hauled away in one *Embrace* community and neighboring areas; added new streetlights; and focused more attention from codes and law enforcement officials.
- In one community that has no bus services for students and where students faced many challenges walking to school, including dark spots, stray dogs, sexual predators, trash and more, worked with the community residents and successfully implemented the *Walking School Bus* program. It now boasts 14 volunteer leaders or *Walking School Bus* drivers and eight different routes. The walking drivers escort and provide pedestrian safety classes to approximately 60 students to and from school daily.
- In one community, worked with citizens and their city council to approve monies to build a new community center so the children and families would have safe places to play and have access to health services and indoor play areas.
- Two cities worked together to change a bus route to provide access to the flea market that contains a farmers market in the other city.
- Worked with the community and found the funding to build safe playgrounds. They are now built in two communities where there were no playgrounds.
- A total of 300 students in after-school programs were educated on the advertising practices of big companies and how to offset the negative messages through healthy eating and active living.
- Worked with a total of 10 students from one low-income area to develop and implement a social media campaign tied to a renovated corner market that led to increased availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and increased sales of these items for the corner market.
- Developed and implemented a patient education program for physicians. A total of 20 physicians in one community are distributing to their low income families prescriptions for healthy eating and active living using the *5-2-1-Almost None* messaging from Nemours.

Leveraging of programs and funding:

As of December 2013, the *Embrace* Communities have started to leverage the Foundation funding to garner other funding and in-kind resources to support the Initiative work long past the Foundation's funding. The total dollars leveraged to date from local, regional and national organizations and local governments is $1.9M.

Legacy Planning:

The Florida Blue Foundation is committed to making sure that when we fund long-term initiatives, like *Embrace*, we exit the initiative in a very thoughtful and caring manner. Therefore, the Foundation engaged with each of the six *Embrace* Lead Organizations and Community Coalitions around a new concept called "Community Legacy" planning. We asked them to identify what from the *Embrace* Initiative is important to keep in their communities long past our funding. They met over a year to determine their priorities and then developed the plan and the possible funding/resource development plan to not only keep it alive, but rather to have it led and managed by the Community Coalitions. The six communities are actively seeking financial and in-kind resources to meet their two- to five-year plans. For example, in one community, Opa-locka, the Coalition met with the City Mayor and Council and shared their plans for a Covered Farmers Market and Food Hub and the need for the City to donate some prime unused land to build the facility that will eventually house fresh food for the community, banks, antique markets, bakery, cannery and space for the farmers to process and package their crops for the local community and beyond. The land was donated by the City, an architect volunteered his time to create the design for the structure and a construction company has agreed to build the needed 10,000-square-foot building. They are on their way to making a difference in the lives of the citizens in that community and beyond. This is just one story of success that has happened as a result of the *Embrace* Initiative.

Below are a few stories from each of the *Embrace* Communities. We are proud to have partnered with these communities to make a difference in the lives of the children, families and the built environment. More in-depth information about the Initiative and the products will be available in mid-2015.

Hialeah Public Libraries - Healthy Lifestyle at Your Library

Hialeah Public Libraries, one of the 23 mini-grantees funded through the Florida Blue Foundation *Embrace a Healthy Florida* and *Hialeah Healthy Families* initiatives, provides a cornucopia of educational and hands-on activities that foster healthy eating and active living habits for children and families. A diverse and interactive program, *Healthy Lifestyle at Your Library* encourages positive lifestyle practices through gardening, art projects, fitness activities, and culinary classes. The activities included a "Ready-to-Grow Gardens" workshop, Short Chef's "Decorate Your Veggie Cupcake" activity, the "Eat Right" Summer Program by Common Threads, and "Let's Get Fit". These programs served a total of 155 adults and 289 children in the City of Hialeah. By serving these individuals, they have begun to embrace their role in the community and promote these programs to others. It has become a stepping stone in educating a generation of health-conscious individuals in Hialeah.

"The garden at my library is super cute, cool, and amazing," said 11-year-old Daleidys. And six-year-old Yetsie said, "This garden is a beautiful place to keep," at the opening of the Library Garden, also the location for the "Ready-to-Grow Gardens" workshop.

The "Ready-to-Grow Gardens" workshop provided the community with hands-on lessons on the basics of planting and maintaining an edible garden. Families learned how to increase their access to healthy and nutritious fruits and vegetables, and how increasing consumption of these contributes to a healthier lifestyle, including preventing obesity, as well as reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

The program aligns with the Florida Blue Foundation's focus on healthy lifestyles and promoting better health in communities. Hialeah Public Libraries and its partners designed successful programming all year to feature fun, educational and engaging activities which will motivate children and families to make smarter choices, encourage healthier practices, and take action against childhood obesity.

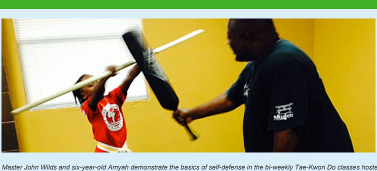
Jacksonville

Access to fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables is minimal in parts of Duval County. Through a community member partnership with Florida Organic Growers and Beaches Green Market, we have been able to rectify this epidemic in one area of Jacksonville. Open year-round, from 2pm-5pm every Saturday, rain or shine, at Jarboe Park in Neptune Beach, the Beaches Green Market has been recognized by shoppers and vendors alike as the "model" producer-only market in Northeast Florida. With 31 booth spots, thousands of shoppers come each week to buy local produce, meats, artisan cheeses, fresh baked breads, local honey and much more!

In 2013 the Beaches Green Market was approved to become a SNAP/EBT retailer, which enables the market to provide access to the best local food on the First Coast to all community members. In addition, through their partnership with Florida Organic Growers, the Market now offers Fresh Access Bucks, a program that doubles the amount of Florida grown fruits and vegetables SNAP recipients can purchase at the market. This was a result of grant funding received from the Florida Blue Foundation as part of the *Healthy Jacksonville Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition* initiative. The Beaches Green Market is now able to have an EBT manager on-site at the market each week, who also organizes monthly healthy food education programs to benefit SNAP recipients through cooking demonstrations, nutrition material, recipe cards and more.

"With each year, the Green Market keeps growing, fostering healthy lifestyles and community spirit while supporting local farmers, ultimately leading to nutritious food on all our tables," said Devon Ritch, Director, Beaches Local Food Network.

Tampa/Sulphur Springs



Master John Wilds and six-year-old Amyah demonstrate the basics of self-defense in the bi-weekly Tae-Kwon Do classes hosted at the Abundant Life (Novous Vitae) Church in Sulphur Springs, Tampa.

Tae-Kwon Do: Fighting Obesity and Raising Self-Esteem in Sulphur Springs

Observe any one of the current 20 youth participants in the Novous Vitae Tae-Kwon Do classes in Sulphur Springs and you will hear the typical sentiments of, "This is fun!" or "I don't want to leave." Listen a bit closer and 13-year-old Jevon will also share, "This class helped me improve my discipline and allowed me to concentrate better." Six-year-old Amyah will chime in to tell you, "I feel more responsible for my actions and I feel like a better person." Jevon's dad proudly looks on and shares that, "Jevon is not as timid as he was at the beginning of the class and the class helped build his self-esteem."

With a fee-based martial arts center located on the outskirts of the Sulphur Springs community, parents and children had limited access to programs like Tae-Kwon Do due to financial circumstances and transportation issues. For the first time, children have access to free Tae-Kwon Do classes hosted by the Abundant Life (Novous Vitae) Church and administered through the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA and its *Creating A Healthier Sulphur Springs for Kids* (CHSSK) Initiative. A mini-grant from the Florida Blue Foundation makes this growing opportunity possible by providing resources for staffing, incentives and community partnerships.

The bi-weekly classes are led by Master John Wilds. Students also receive regular interactive nutrition classes as part of their Tae-Kwon Do instruction. Discussions about My Plate and the importance of eating healthy are incorporated into the lessons and children visit the junk food tree where they replace unhealthy foods with an assortment of healthy food from each food group. Improved self-esteem, discipline, and knowledge of healthy eating are all part of the focus of these classes to help address the causes and prevention of childhood obesity.

The CHSSK Initiative is a part of the Florida Blue Foundation's *Embrace a Healthy Florida* Initiative. This initiative focuses on a community-driven, multi-sector approach to making long-term changes in health for not only youth but also for their families and communities. CHSSK focuses on the unique needs of the Sulphur Springs community by addressing six key areas: Child Care, Youth, and Families; Community Outreach; Healthy Living; Access to Care; Food and Nutrition; and Safety, Access, and Community Pride. Novous Vitae is a part of a group of 17 other mini-grant recipients, a vibrant Coalition, and many other key stakeholders who are helping to create a healthier Sulphur Springs for kids like Jevon and Amyah and their families.

Tallahassee

Institutionalizing Walking And Talking About Eating (I-WATE)
Bond Community Health Center

"When the doctor told me that I had diabetes, I said to him, 'The devil is a lie…NOT ME!'. But, I was in the hospital with a blood sugar over 400," said Pamela Johnson. "All I want to do is lose some weight, get my blood sugar down, and get off some of this medicine." Through her participation in the I-WATE program, Pamela set a goal to lose weight, bring her blood glucose levels under control, and improve her mobility in order to qualify for employment. And, she did! She even received the "I-WATE Goal Maker" award for 2013-2014.

I-WATE (Institutionalizing Walking And Talking About Eating) is a family intervention that integrates chants about the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet with walking routines, and provides needed skills training and motivation for behavioral change related to healthy eating and active living. DASH, endorsed by key authoritative public health agencies, is a total diet plan focusing on liberal amounts of vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy products and whole grains; moderate amounts of low-fat meats; and limited sweets and fats. Bond Community Health Center and Florida State University Nutrition, Food, and Exercise Sciences partnered on the project and worked together to improve the health of those living in the area around the health center.

Monthly, adults and their children assemble at Bond Community Health Center for a wellness class that begins with in-door walking to instrumental music with voiceover chants promoting the DASH diet. Walks are followed by nutrition lessons featuring food demonstrations that promote DASH food groups, taste-tests, table-talk, portion control and related topics. Classes are held the first Saturday of each month and homework packets are mailed out during the month to reinforce face-to-face lessons. Supporting the program is an interactive website that provides WATE materials (cooking demonstrations, recipes, etc.) and documents WATE activities and accomplishments.

Bond Community Health Center received two Florida Blue Foundation mini-grants through the Tallahassee Childhood Obesity Prevention Education Coalition (Tally COPE), a part of the Foundation's *Embrace a Healthy Florida* initiative addressing the causes and prevention of childhood obesity. The aim of the first mini-grant was to determine the feasibility and appeal of using a community health center to promote WATE to patients, their families and acquaintances residing in the target area, wherein rates of obesity and obesity-related diseases are elevated. Successful WATE pilot-test outcomes resulted in the second grant to build WATE into the Bond Community Health Center organizational and administrative systems.

Better blood pressure control, better blood sugar control, a better blood lipid profile, and improved weight management are all documented benefits of following the DASH Program of diet and walking regularly.

Tallahassee Food Network takes message national

Delegates of Tallahassee Food Network represented their city and a growing movement of good food advocacy at the Jefferson Awards for Public Service banquet in Washington, D.C., June 13-16, 2014.

Tallahassee Food Network (TFN) co-founder Nathan Ballentine was awarded the Jefferson Award for Public Service at the *Tallahassee Democrat's* Volunteers of the Year awards luncheon in May. Ballentine was recognized for his volunteer efforts co-directing TFN and co-coordinating the TFN youth empowerment program, *iGrow Whatever You Like*.

TFN's *iGrow Whatever You Like* and other services of the food network are components of several mini-grantees engaged by the Tallahassee Childhood Obesity Prevention and Education Coalition with funding from the Florida Blue Foundation's *Embrace a Healthy Florida* Initiative addressing the causes and prevention of childhood obesity. Gardening, nutrition education and access to fresh fruits and vegetables are components of the COPE Coalition's call to action plan addressing healthy eating and active living needs in and around Tallahassee.

As the Jefferson Award recipient, Ballentine was sent to D.C. to represent Tallahassee at the banquet. Ballentine brought along TFN delegates Mary Elizabeth Ballentine, iGrow Start-up Culinary Coordinator; Sundiata Ameh-El, iGrow Director; and Clarenia White, iGrow Market Staff.

"We work to grow community-based good food systems as a team," said Ballentine. "So we travel as a team."

Alongside the hundreds of volunteers who convened in D.C. to represent their communities and the admirable causes that drive their passion to serve countless hours of service, Ballentine and the TFN delegation represented their dreams and vision for collaboration, empowerment and food security.

With the mission to work across lines of division to grow community-based good food systems that work for everyone, TFN and its more than 260 organizational partners have demonstrated success in uniting people despite differences in socio-economic factors, race, professional level, political affiliations or religious beliefs. TFN thinks in terms of movement building, capacity building and Asset Based Community Development – the idea that everyone has resources, skills, ideas and associations to bring to the table. TFN believes that sharing dreams and helping people achieve their dreams is the dynamism that grows movements. This vision has resonated among the Tallahassee community through Ballentine's recognition, and will continue to spread as the TFN delegates build more connections and partnerships at the Jefferson Awards banquet in D.C. and beyond.

Tallahassee Food Network and iGrow representatives Mary Elizabeth Ballentine, Nathan Ballentine, Clarenia White, and Sundiata Ameh-El at the Jefferson Awards in Washington, D.C., where Mr. Ballentine received his Jefferson Award.

Wolfson Children's Hospital

Kidz Bite Back at Riverside Presbyterian Day School in Jacksonville

Kidz Biting Back

Six hundred students from the Northeast Florida area are learning how to bite back against unhealthy lifestyles. *Kidz Bite Back*, a program funded by Florida Blue Foundation, and administered by THE PLAYERS Center for Child Health at Wolfson Children's Hospital, teaches students to become smarter consumers by revealing marketing techniques that promote overconsumption of unhealthy foods and drinks and encourage overuse of TV watching and video games. The kid-created, kid-led, kid-spread campaign was designed to educate fourth and fifth grade students on Big Fat Industries (fast food, soft drink, junk food industries), Couch Potato Companies (national TV networks, video game companies) and the basics of living healthy. Fourth and fifth grade student leaders train their fellow students using a PowerPoint presentation and web-based activities, becoming "Kidz", empowered to be smarter consumers and make healthier choices. The purpose is to impact family culture by improving nutrition, physical activity and educated consumerism – all of which contribute to preventing obesity.

Working with YMCA of Florida's First Coast summer camps and after-school programs, Riverside Presbyterian Day School, and Communities in Schools and Duval County Schools after-school programs, THE PLAYERS Center for Child Health at Wolfson Children's Hospital provided training materials to Kidz Advocates who shared their new knowledge with their peers.

YMCA Atlantic Kids Campus in Nassau County held their summit in February. A week following the summit, Jen Stallings, Regional Youth Development Director, shared her thoughts. "Our *Kidz Bite Back!* YMCA advocates presented a *Kidz Bite Back* summit last week on-site to spread awareness to our program participants, families and community representatives. They planned the event on their own and provided handwritten invitations, shared an educational PowerPoint, presented a group music video demonstrating health habits in a fun and creative way, hosted interactive games and provided yummy healthy snacks. We are very proud of their commitment to good health."

Kidz Bite Back at Rufus Payne Elementary School in Jacksonville

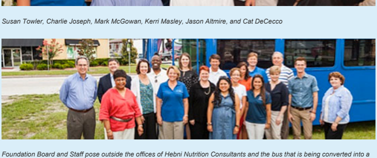
Foundation Board Members "Embrace" One Community

The Florida Blue Foundation Board held its June 18, 2014, Board meeting and had a great healthy lunch in an *Embrace* community, Orlando/Parramore, at Hebni Nutrition Consultants, a grantee that teaches families how to buy and prepare healthy foods. The Board also conducted site visits at two of the *Embrace* projects, the community garden and the refurbished and redesigned community corner store in a food desert location of Parramore. The store now carries fresh vegetables, fruits and other healthy products. The community now shops there for their family groceries, since a supermarket is about nine miles away. The pictures below are of Board members and grantees in the *Embrace* community.

Gary Healy, Renée Finley, Penny Shaffer

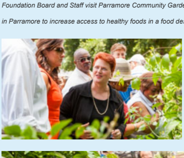
Darnell Smith, Maria Moutinho, Jason Altmire

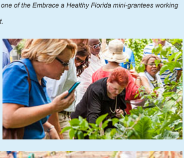
Susan Towler, Charlie Joseph, Mark McGowan, Kerri Masley, Jason Altmire, and Cat DeCecco

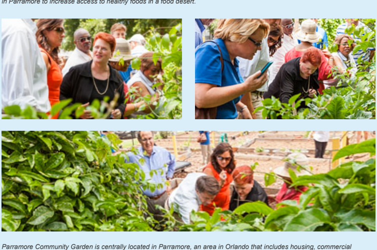


Foundation Board and Staff pose outside the offices of Hebni Nutrition Consultants and the bus that is being converted into a mobile farmers market and nutrition education center. Fresh Stop, the name of the mobile farmers market, is expected to begin service in the Fall of 2014.

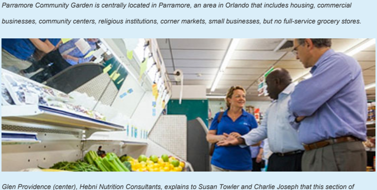
Foundation Board and Staff visit Parramore Community Garden, one of the Embrace a Healthy Florida mini-grantees working in Parramore to increase access to healthy foods in a food desert.







Parramore Community Garden is centrally located in Parramore, an area in Orlando that includes housing, commercial businesses, community centers, religious institutions, corner markets, small businesses, but no full-service grocery stores.



Glen Providence (center), Hebni Nutrition Consultants, explains to Susan Towler and Charlie Joseph that this section of SunLife Grocery now displays fresh fruits and vegetables instead of beer, sodas and chips as the result of a Promising Practices grant from the Embrace a Healthy Florida initiative.

Special Notice

The 2015 SAPPHIRE AWARDS Nomination Applications are now available and ready for your use. The closing date is September 19, 2014. Please nominate some of the deserving individuals, programs and organizations in your communities across Florida. Click here for information on eligibility and guidelines and to make your nomination.

CORRECTION
The previous issue of the e-newsletter incorrectly stated the amount awarded to Paul Ahr, Winner, Individual Category, 2014 Sapphire Award. The correct amount is $50,000. We apologize for the error.

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