YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM: A GRANT PROPOSAL

Bethany Watson
California State University Long Beach
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INTRODUCTION

- More than one-third of adults and 17% of youth in the United States (U.S.) are obese or overweight (CDC; 2015a, 2015b).

- Low-income and minority populations are disproportionately affected by poor access to affordable and healthy food (Corrigan, 2011; Larson, Story, & Nelson, 2009).

- Inadequate accessibility to supermarkets may contribute to less-healthy diets and influence a greater risk for chronic, diet-related diseases (Zenk, Schulz, Israel, James, & Wilson, 2005).

- According to the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (2015), an American meal travels about 1,500 miles to get from farm to plate.

- Community gardens facilitate many different practices and processes such as fruit and vegetable cultivation, health benefits, food security, social capital formation, civic participation, recreation, environmental education, and income generation (Drake & Lawson, 2014; Draper & Freedman, 2010).

- **Goals of the project:** 1) To increase knowledge of healthy eating, gardening, environmental sustainability and food security in at-risk youth, 2) help program participants achieve or maintain a healthy body weight for their age and height 3) increase fruit and vegetable intake, 4) increase community involvement in health and food justice issues.
SOCIAL WORK RELEVANCE

- The mission of the social work profession is to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2015, Preamble, para. 1), as stated in the Code of Ethics.

- Social workers are in a pivotal position to address the issue of food scarcity in communities.

- Not having access to a basic human need such as healthy food is socially unjust.

- What is even more unjust is that such issues are mostly affecting minority populations.
CROSS CULTURAL RELEVANCE

- The disproportionate distribution of healthy food stores contributes to the development of unhealthy behaviors in these communities which greatly affects not only the individuals and families, but society as a whole (Hilmers, Hilmers, & Dave, 2012).

- The fact that there is unequal access to healthy food for low income and racial minorities gives this project multicultural relevance.
METHODS

- **Target population:** youth, ages 14-25, from low income and racial minority backgrounds

- **Strategies used to identify funding source:**
  - Geographic area of interest (San Diego)
  - Amount and duration of funding available
  - Mission of funder aligned with goal of program

- **Funding source selected:**
  - Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Evidence for Action: Investigator-Initiated Research to Build a Culture of Health program
METHODS CONTINUED

- **Sources used for needs assessment:**
  - Demographic data: U.S. Census Bureau
  - Health related data: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website
  - Information of food access in Southeast San Diego: U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Access Research Atlas
  - All other information: literature review of scholarly articles

- **Projected budget range and categories:**
  - $111,089 for one year of operation
    - Budget includes: salaries (of Program Coordinator, Program Assistant, Expert Gardener, and Licensed Practical Nurse), water costs, all garden costs, program and training supplies, program event costs, and office supplies/equipment.
The purpose of the community garden program is to provide the opportunity for youth ages 14 to 25 of low income and racial/ethnic minority backgrounds to improve their nutritional intake and to participate in a local food system where they will learn how to plant, grow, and harvest various fruits and vegetables using sustainable methods.

The primary purpose of the program is to educate youth about healthy eating habits and the food system, and to ultimately influence the effects of food scarcity in this low income community.

The program will enroll 15 interested youth who regularly attend South Bay Community Services TAY program in Southeast San Diego to participate in a 10 month program guided by The Food Project’s Sustainable Agriculture Curriculum.

- program will incorporate workshops on team building, communication, the food system, obesity, and hunger and homelessness.
- Participants will plan and execute two community open house events to educate their community and sell produce from the garden.
**GRANT PROPOSAL**

- **Sustainability**
  - RWJF grant and other funders as necessary, community donations, community partnerships, and profits made from open house events.

- **Program Objectives**
  1. To increase knowledge of healthy eating, gardening, environmental sustainability and food security in at-risk youth at the South Bay Community Services TAY through a gardening education program.
  2. To help program participants achieve or maintain a healthy body weight for their age and height.
  3. To increase fruit and vegetable intake among program participants.
  4. To increase community involvement in health and food justice issues.

- **Program Evaluation**
  - Analysis of the BMI classification data
  - Pre- and post-tests will be used to evaluate the program’s influence on eating behaviors and attitudes, and fruit and vegetable consumption.
  - Participant and community partner satisfaction survey responses will help evaluate the program’s design, execution, and help guide program staff toward areas that need improvement.
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

- Social workers are in a pivotal position to address issues related to food justice, environmental justice, and health.

- Social work’s ecological perspective can aid in addressing food and health related concerns in an effective way.

- A core value in the social work profession is social justice (NASW, 2015).
  - The current disparities in food accessibility and health outcomes are social justice issues.

- Social worker’s skills in advocacy and policy can aid in making systemic changes related to food quality, environmental sustainability, and health-related outcomes.
REFERENCES


