

COMMUNITY GARDENING AND NUTRITIONAL HEALTH
PROGRAM FOR LOW-INCOME YOUTH AFFECTED BY FOOD
SCARCITY: A GRANT PROPOSAL

Presented to the School of Social Work

California State University, Long Beach

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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May 2014

Introduction

- ❖ *Access to healthy and affordable food is a problem in many communities in the United States.* According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 11.5 million people in the United States live in low income areas that are more than 1 mile away from a supermarket or grocery chain that sells fresh produce at an affordable price (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2009). These urban communities, called “food deserts,” most prominently affect residents of rural, low income, and minority communities (Larson, Story, & Nelson, 2009).
- ❖ *Poor dietary patterns lead to a high risk of obesity and other diet-related diseases, which are experienced at higher rates by individuals from low income households and ethnic minorities* (Besthorn, 2013; Conway & Lassiter, 2011; Larsen & Gilliland, 2009; Larson et al., 2009; Valera, Gallin, Schuk, & Davis, 2009).
- ❖ *A viable means of bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to the tables of residents of low income areas is the creation of a community garden.* Individuals who garden have been shown to have healthier habits than those who do not garden and community gardens are opportunities for people to foster healthy behaviors (Litt et al., 2011).
- ❖ *The purpose of this project was to write a grant to fund a community garden program and a nutritional program in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club in Monrovia, California.* The nutritional program will provide gardening, nutrition, and cooking classes that will be run by volunteer expert gardeners and nutritionists. A part-time bilingual Program Coordinator will run the gardening program and lead the program participants through community engagement projects in which program participants engage their community regarding healthy and food security issues.

Social Work Relevance

- ❖ The work of addressing food scarcity is in line with the primary mission of social work, which is to “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], 2013, Preamble, para. 1), as stated in the professional Code of Ethics. The proposed program would address the social problem of vulnerable people living poverty having disproportionate access to a fundamental need, that is, healthy food, based on socioeconomic status.
- ❖ The work of creating a community garden will not only meet individual needs by providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in a community affected by food scarcity, but also create opportunities for community members to create and sustain relationships, to develop community pride in their neighborhood, and to become empowered to become indigenous leaders by encouraging them to take on teaching classes and managing responsibilities in the garden, all of which reflect the social work values of service and the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2013).

Cross-Cultural Relevance

- ❖ People of who are of an ethnic minority background are more likely to experience poor health than Whites (Larson et al., 2009) and many of these health problems come from a lack of access to healthy food in their neighborhoods. The fact that there is a disproportionate access to healthy foods for ethnic minorities who live in low income urban areas gives the proposed project multicultural relevance.
- ❖ Community gardens are an opportunity for people from a variety of backgrounds to not only gain access to healthy food, but also to grow food from their indigenous cultures. Food and sharing meals have immense importance in a variety of cultures; this project's emphasis on growing, cooking, and sharing foods from a variety of backgrounds provides an opportunity for celebrating multicultural diversity.

Methods

- ❖ The target population for this grant is youth ages 5 to 18 that are participants at the Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills in Monrovia, California. The Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills serves children from the cities of Arcadia, Duarte, and Monrovia, California, which are densely populated and multi-ethnic communities (Boys and Girls Club of America, 2012). Many of the children who attend the Boys and Girls Club are considered at-risk.
- ❖ The writer utilized keywords and phrases such as “grants,” “community garden grants,” “Los Angeles county grants,” and “California grants” to locate grant and funding source databases. Phrases such as “education grants,” “nutrition education grants,” and “community development grants” were utilized as well. The writer located a number of websites that provided a list of potential funding sources for community gardens through associations such as the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), Kids Gardening, America in Bloom, and Garden ABCs.
- ❖ The chosen grant was the Opal® apple Youth Make a Difference Initiative, which provides 10 grants of up to \$75,000 for projects that engage youth in addressing issues of food security, nutrition, agriculture, and food politics within the United States. The nature of the grant and the funding amount makes this grant the most suitable for this project because of the foundation’s focus on youth leadership, community development, and alleviating the burdens of food scarcity.

Methods

- ❖ The grant writer utilized several sources to gather data needed for this grant. Demographic data for the neighborhoods of the participants at the Boys and Girls Club were gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, and health-related data for the neighborhoods were gathered from the California Health Inventory, a program run by the University of California, Los Angeles. Information about food access in the neighborhoods was obtained through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Access Research Atlas online. The majority of information regarding the need for this program was gathered from a thorough literature review of studies on food deserts and food security in the United States, health disparities among ethnic minorities in the United States, and the positive health benefits and promotion of community engagement provided by community gardens. Further information and data regarding the Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills was obtained from the organization's director.
- ❖ The projected budget for a 12-month program is \$75,022, not including in-kind donations. This budget includes salary and benefits for the part-time bilingual program and a per diem contract with the MSW group leader. Operating expenses and program supplies will include gardening supplies, transportation costs, program event costs, training costs, office supplies, and printing and postage. In-kind donations include salaries and benefits for the program support staff and hours from a volunteer nurse practitioner, gardening experts, and program volunteers, as well as gardening land and tools, facility utilities and maintenance, furniture, equipment, and some program supply costs. In-kind donations total \$83,900.

Grant Proposal

- ❖ In an effort to combat health concerns due to poor access to healthy food among at-risk youth in the San Gabriel Valley, the proposed program will establish a community garden and nutrition program at the Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills in Monrovia, California.
- ❖ This 12-month program will focus on the process of planting, maintaining, and harvesting produce from a community garden plot on the Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills facility, as well as healthy eating and cooking workshops, knowledge of the food system and ways that program participants can get involved, and a multicultural celebration of participants' ethnic backgrounds and the native foods of their culture.
- ❖ The program will also include a group on leadership and empowerment for the participants, as well as community engagement projects in which program participants engage their community regarding healthy and food security issues. The proposed program is expected to have positive health and educational outcomes for at-risk youth, as well as raise awareness of food security issues in the community.

Grant Proposal

❖ Program Goals and Objectives:

- ❖ 1) **Goal:** To increase knowledge of gardening, healthy eating, and food security in youth at the Boys and Girls Club of the Foothills through a gardening education program. **Objective:** To enroll 20 eligible youth ages 12 to 18 to participate in the program.
- ❖ 2.) **Goal:** To improve healthy eating habits among program participants. **Objective:** Participants in the program will eat the USDA recommending serving of 2 to 4 servings of fruits and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables daily, as documented through self-reporting pre- and post-tests (Guthrie, 2013).
- ❖ 3) **Goal:** To increase community involvement in health and food security issues. **Objective:** With the help of the Program Coordinator, program participants will plan, prepare, and execute community engagement events around the themes of gardening, healthy eating, multiculturalism, and food security.
- ❖ 4) **Goal:** To develop leadership skills among at-risk youth. **Objective:** Through participation in the leadership development group, participants will increase their leadership skills and display preparedness to develop and execute community engagement events

❖ Evaluation:

- ❖ The evaluation of the program will include an assessment of the effectiveness of the community garden program in terms of increasing participants' intake of fruits and vegetables. At the beginning of the program, a pre-test will be administered to program participants asking them to report how many fruits and vegetables they usually eat per day with the same questionnaire provided at the end of the program to determine if the percentage of program participants who consumed the USDA recommended servings of fruits and vegetables increased over the course of the program.
- ❖ Community involvement in health and food security issues will be evaluated through community partnership satisfaction surveys, which will be given to community partners after the completion of a community engagement project. The questionnaires will include ratings of community partners' satisfaction with the program, the project, and the means in which the project engaged the community on health and food issues using a 5-point Likert-type scale. An open-ended response space will be provided for community partners to share their thoughts and provide feedback.

Implication for Social Work

Health Disparities and Structural Inequality

The issue of food scarcity among urban, low-income ethnic minority groups is of the utmost importance to the field of social work. The disparity in accessibility to healthy and fresh produce among low-income and ethnic minority communities, and the resulting disparities in health outcomes, are also issues that demand the involvement of the social work field. The lack of grocery stores in urban areas, paired with the higher prevalence of fast food chains and convenience stores is a structural inequality that disproportionately affects low-income and ethnic minority populations. Although focusing on individual health decisions is important in developing healthy eating habits and curbing long-term chronic illnesses, such efforts will only go so far if members of the community are unable to access and afford the food that will make them healthy.

Role of Social Workers in Food System

Social workers can greatly contribute to the efforts already in place to address issues of food security and accessibility in the United States. As social movements to address food security involve individuals, families, and communities, social workers' consideration of the bio-social-psycho-cultural realities of individuals and communities can contribute to addressing food-related concerns in an effective and culturally competent way. Social workers' community development skills can enable collaboration with grassroots organizers who are seeking to address food security concerns in a neighborhood or community setting, while the program management and administrative skills developed by social workers can help create effective programs that strive to address such needs in a holistic way. Social workers can also utilize their grant writing skills to help programs generate funding to address the food security needs of communities. Lastly, social workers can apply their knowledge and training regarding policy writing and analysis to address food security issues on a broader level, leading to long-term, systemic change to ensure equal access to healthy food and improved health outcomes for all citizens.

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