



Marion County

Bridging the Gap of Food Insecurity through Inclusivity

Summary

Individual health is more than just individual choice and behavior. Many influences impact a person's health, such as safe neighborhoods, access to employment, education and healthcare, as well as affordable healthy food access and safe spaces to be physically active. It is essential to use a multi-sector approach to improve community health because the health of an individual and the community at large has so many variables. The Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) coalition is utilizing a collective community inclusion strategy to tackle one of our largest known health disparities.

Challenge

Marion County has many challenges when it comes to healthy eating. First, according to the 2015 Marion County

Health Assessment (CHA), 76 percent of adults and 85 percent of youth reported eating fewer than the recommended five servings of fruits/vegetables. Second is that Marion received a 5.8 rating in 2015 on the RWJF Food Environment Index which is a rating range from 0 (worst) to 10 (best) weighing limited access to healthy food and food insecurity together as indicators of the food environment. . Third, there are many residents living below the federal poverty level, which according to U.S. Census Bureau includes 37 percent of west-side residents and nearly 48 percent of north-end residents. Additionally, the CHA identifies approximately 17.4 percent of Marion County's population as having a disability, who as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suffer from higher rates of obesity and other health factors. With all this information in mind and community inclusion as a goal, local partners joined together to increase healthy food access,

remove transportation barriers, reduce food insecurity and integrate those living with disabilities into a community-wide solution.

Solution

In an effort to mitigate health inequities that exist in our community, a multi-disciplinary approach was developed to address one of our community's largest health disparities: access to healthy and affordable foods. This can be a challenge due to several factors, which include transportation, location of food retailers, financial constraints, and the additional challenges of those living with chronic disease and disability.

A community inclusion strategy was developed to address these issues. In October 2016, Marion County launched its first mobile produce pantry. Based on community data and supported by



the United States Dairy Association's Food Access Research Map, distribution sites were selected based on locations that would positively impact those most adversely affected by poor health outcomes. The mobile produce market not only serves to improve food access in the community, but also provides community volunteer- and work-related skill development opportunities for individuals living with disabilities.

Results

Initial data suggests that this system change is impacting more than a 100 families on a bi-weekly basis, including 25 individuals living with disabilities. Beyond that, improved healthy food access is the secondary goal of community inclusion for individuals with disabilities. This strategic alignment of resources and assets is helping to assure that individuals with disabilities are provided work skills that aid in future employment and volunteer opportunities. While this program is still in the infancy and pilot stages, there are already many favorable responses. In one month, participation has grown by more than 50 percent and high worker satisfaction with individuals living with disabilities is noted by repeat work experience. Furthermore, improved geographic availability of healthy food options to underserved and vulnerable populations has improved. In addition, the CHC coalition is working on providing training and resources to coalition members so they can also implement strategies supportive of individuals living with disabilities. This work is being done by providing training, resources, and the adoption of an inclusion policy.

Sustaining Success

The establishment of this mobile produce pantry is a step towards improving food

insecurity in Marion County. However, this short term solution is part of a much larger, more comprehensive food plan and community-wide commitment to community inclusion envisioned by the CHC Program. Partnering with the Marion County Board of Developmental Disabilities (DD) has allowed the CHC coalition to strategize additional sustainability inclusive solutions to further address access to healthy food and physical activity for our community. The Marion County Board of DD seeks volunteer and skill training opportunities that foster community inclusion.

Your Involvement is Key

Communities can start with small improvements to improve inclusivity. These accommodations can lead to big changes over time.

- Actively recruit people with disabilities, family members and other disability advocates to be represented and/or to provide consultation as appropriate.
- Convene meetings and hold activities in facilities and areas that are accessible for people with disabilities.
- Ensure publications and marketing efforts depict a diverse population of participants in coalition activities, including people with disabilities
- Educate and advocate to other community leaders on inclusion strategies, along with information on disability, accessibility and health disparities experienced by people with disabilities.
- Encourage other organizations to adopt similar commitments and/or present educational information at their representative organizations and other committees.



"The community partnerships to put this together have been amazing."

— Jessica Trainer, Director of Human Resources, Marion County Board of Developmental Disabilities



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