

Youth as Partners on the Road to Health

Genesee Valley Educational Partnership

Genesee Valley Educational Partnership (GVEP) and its partners at Buffalo Niagara Medical Center (BNMC) are working with youth, residents, community-based organizations, and urban farmers to get fresh produce to neighborhoods that need it most.

A Win-Win for Buffalo—Linking Farmers and Residents

Healthy, affordable food has been out of reach for far too many Buffalo residents, especially minorities and members of low-income households in East Buffalo. These residents are disproportionately affected because they are less likely to own a car, reliant on scant public transportation, struggling financially, and suffer from high rates of chronic diseases. Accessing high-quality fresh food has meant either visiting one of the many corner stores that offered overpriced, low-quality produce, or traveling significant distances.



Youth Build youth who helped to design and build the mobile produce stands

The recent surge in the number of urban growers and producers in East Buffalo bodes well, but challenges remain. For example, new farmers may

have difficulty establishing themselves as a trusted source in the neighborhoods they are growing in, while those farmers who have community roots lack capacity to serve neighborhoods beyond their own. Other challenges are gaining community support for healthy food, and farmers' lack of knowledge about bureaucratic requirements for establishing a market stand, as many wish to.

As a result of GVEP's partnership with BNMC, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) funding paved the way for a collaborative, community-driven, sustainable, solution-based project to increase access to healthy affordable food in East Buffalo. The project is helping build neighborhood capacity and self-reliance.



Youth work on the mobile produce kiosk

Partnering to Promote Health

East Buffalo's GroundWork Market Garden, a 1-acre urban farm, offers farm shares and has a stand at the North Buffalo Farmer's Market. A fairly new addition to the neighborhood, GroundWork wanted to gain trust so it could involve the community, particularly

youth, in food and gardening activities and education. Owners thought that a mobile produce stand would help them connect with residents and be a place for community gatherings, celebrations, and a bus stop resting station.

The African Heritage Food Co-op has availed fresh produce to more than 30,000 families in two years. Members and non-members pay an affordable monthly fee in exchange for a box of local and seasonal and culturally relevant produce that can be picked up at one of the many mobile market sites throughout East Buffalo, which are in walking distance of many homes. With the long-term goal of establishing a brick-and-mortar location, founder Alexander Wright wanted to set up a mobile produce stand as a way to convene community members, clean up the neighborhood, and reduce crime.

But how—and by whom—would the mobile produce stands for GroundWork and the Co-op be built?

Youth—the Foundation for Change

GVEP and BNMC connected GroundWork and the Co-op to the Foundry, a nonprofit small business incubator in East Buffalo. The Foundry has a makerspace, wood and metal shops, tech and textile labs, and a partnership with the Service Collaborative of Western New York's YouthBuild Program. YouthBuild gives at-risk and low-income youth the opportunity to complete their education and learn in-demand job skills while taking part in community revitalization projects. So, on Friday mornings between January and July 2018, East Buffalo YouthBuild participants gathered at The Foundry and, under the tutelage of professional carpenters and welders, designed and constructed the mobile produce stands.

These community-member built, recently opened stands are helping the Co-op and GroundWork further their mission of providing access to fresh foods to their (formerly underserved) neighbors in East Buffalo.



This mobile produce stand inspired the final built stands



to learn more...

contact: Joan Vitkus, Genesee Valley Education Partnership, jvitkus@gvboces.org
or Beth Machnica, Buffalo Niagara Medical Center emachnica@bnmc.org



Creating Healthy Schools and Communities

The places where we live, learn, work, and play all contribute to our ability to become and stay healthy. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC), a five-year (2015-2020) New York State Department of Health-funded initiative, is helping build stronger, healthier communities.