Partnering to Nourish North Carolina

February 11, 2014

ncrpa.net/nourishingnc
Aligning Missions

**BCBSNC MISSION:** Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina delivers value through quality products, information and services to help our customers improve their health and well-being.

**BCBSNC VISION:** To be a leader in improving the health care system in North Carolina.

**NCRPA MISSION:** North Carolina Recreation & Park Association (NCRPA) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization, dedicated to the advancement of the park, recreation and leisure profession in our state.
More than 31 percent of children ages 2 to 4 are considered overweight or at risk for becoming overweight\(^1\)

Two-thirds of the state’s adults are obese or overweight, with numbers increasing above the national average\(^2\)

Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity cost the state an estimated $57 billion per year in avoidable medical expenses, workers’ compensation claims and lost productivity\(^3\)
The challenge: To increase access to healthy food in our communities

+ Research shows that when communities have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, they eat them — and they’re healthier for it, having lower rates of obesity, diabetes and other diet related diseases.  

+ Many North Carolinians have limited access to fresh produce in their community. And they may not have adequate transportation to get it somewhere else.

+ In many communities, it’s much easier and cheaper to access high-fat, high-calorie food from fast-food restaurants and convenience stores than to find a fresh apple, cucumber or head of lettuce.

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Community gardens are simple plots of land — of all shapes and sizes — maintained by the community’s residents and local organizations.

They provide:
- Greater access to locally harvested fresh fruits and vegetables
- Opportunities for neighborhood and community development
- Venues for physical activity and education
- Protected green space
One solution: Create more community gardens

+ Increase access to healthy food to help reverse these unhealthy trends by creating more community gardens.

+ To create community gardens, and sustain them well into the future, BCBSNC partnered with the North Carolina Recreation and Park Association (NCRPA).

+ Our partnership will help ensure that North Carolinians in every county have a means of sustaining a local source of healthy food.

Nourishing North Carolina initiative:
To enhance or establish at least one community garden in each of North Carolina’s 100 counties.
Through collaboration with local health departments, cooperative extension agencies and parks and recreation departments we developed a comprehensive, statewide community gardens program.

The program structure required multiple players to be involved and to bring their knowledge and expertise. This encouraged relationships to grow and resulted in these entities also partnering on other projects.

Prior to this initiative, there was a lack of alignment of goals. Since funding sources vary, there is a disconnect as to priorities and what needs to be accomplished.
Value of Partnerships (continued)

+ By making connections with like-minded groups, we can maximize resources.

+ Each community partner brought expertise and resources:
  ▪ Master Gardener – Cooperative Extension
  ▪ Nutritionist – Health Department
  ▪ Volunteers, land, water – NCRPA and local park & recreation agencies
  ▪ Media relations, graphic design, access to data – BCBSNC

+ Ultimately, working together, these groups brought great value to the state.
NNC Gardens
NNC Gardens
Success Stories

Inter-Generational Sharing

We have enjoyed a grandmother and grandson team who are gardening with us. Shirley is a gardener through and through and shares this love with her grandson, Donovan, who has diabetes. We are interested in cultivating more inter-generational sharing of gardening wisdom with youth, and are inspired by their example.
Success Stories

Easter Egg Hunt

- We invited a pre-school group to come over and help harvest potatoes. It was like an Easter egg hunt. Once they picked the potatoes from the plant we showed them how many more were in the ground around the plant. The kids took home all the potatoes they harvested. They come out weekly to check on their plants and pull weeds. Many of these kids come from disadvantaged lifestyle so this was a new and educational experience.
Success Stories

Filling A Need

We have several of our senior citizens working in the garden and are able to use the produce that has been grown. We have one particular lady that really struggles financially and does not get a balanced meal everyday. During our harvest season she is the happiest person around. She cooks and cans as much as she possibly can to get her through the winter months. She is very proud and does not accept gifts well so working in the garden provides her a sense of ownership and she takes the produce with pride.
Success Stories

**Collaboration**

Getting organizations representing more than 100 people to work together on these gardens.

- NC Cooperative Extension
- Master Gardeners
- Wellness Center
- Health Department

First time Collaboration
Who Stole our Veggies?

One of our concerns was making sure the produce would get into the hands of individuals that needed it the most. We had prepared and created this beautiful garden and we wanted all the hard work go towards those less fortunate. One week we were getting ready to harvest, but knew we needed to wait a few more days to let the produce ripen. On the harvest day, we discovered all the produce had been taken. At first we were disheartened but after speaking with the Senior Center we discovered that the seniors had harvested the vegetables and taken them home. We could not have asked for a better outcome.
One vision
Build a healthier, stronger North Carolina

Nourishing North Carolina is an extension of BCBSNC’s long-standing commitment to improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians.

From the inception of the program in 2010 to Dec. 2013:

- 83 gardens were developed or renovated
- Nearly 157,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables were harvested
- Over 4,500 people have consumed from the garden at least 2 servings per day
- In support of food pantries and homeless shelters statewide we’ve donated over 85,000 pounds of food
- Provide over 65,500 hours of physical activity through garden maintenance
Long-Term Sustainability

- We invited the **NC Community Garden Partners** to join the team.

- They serve as a resource for each community garden to provide tips and ongoing education.

- Many of the garden leaders attended NC Community Garden Partners conference.
School & Community Garden Food Safety Guide

Developed with: Dr. Ben Chapman, Assistant Professor, Food Safety Extension Specialist, NC State University.

Lessons Learned

• Barrier:
  ▪ It has been somewhat harder to get community gardens started in very rural communities where many families already have home gardens.
  ▪ The solution has been to reach out to community groups to begin gardens as a service project to provide food for the underserved in their community.

• Tip: You never know where a partnership might come from.
  ▪ NC Recreation and Park Association went to BCBSNC to chat about interns doing a community garden with a local park and recreation department and to provide some connections/information.
  ▪ Left the meeting where the idea had grown to putting a garden in all 100 counties.
Would you like more information?

ncrpa.net/nourishingnc

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