

NORTHEAST BROOKLYN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BEDFORD-STUYVESANT, BROOKLYN



ABOUT NORTHEAST BROOKLYN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation (NEBHDCo) was incorporated in January 1985 as a not-for-profit organization with a mission to provide affordable rental housing to low-income residents of Central Brooklyn. NEBHDCo has developed 2,093 housing units, of which 1,082 are owned by the organization, as well as nearly 52,000 square feet of commercial space throughout the Central Brooklyn community. NEBHDCo's mission has grown over the years to encompass homeownership opportunities, community and economic development initiatives, and human services that affect social change in Central Brooklyn.



Nikki Warsop-Lindo encountered NEBHDCo in the summer of 2016, during a period of transition in her life.

As mom to a young toddler with special needs who required constant attention, she was contemplating how to re-enter the workforce.

Nikki was becoming more mindful of the role food played in her family's health and was frustrated by the challenge of providing a healthful diet for herself and her family while living in a "food apartheid," where good food is plentiful, but marketed to and priced for wealthier newcomers to the neighborhood, not for people like Nikki.

She discovered NEBHDCo at a neighborhood event where staff was promoting the Community Chef Training program. Nikki applied and was accepted into the 2016 session. Since completing the training she has served more than 400 community members as a Community Chef.

Her participation in the program has helped shape her personal and professional goals. "I am more intentional about what I and my young family eat, how that food is prepared, and where I source it. I'm also skilled

and experienced in helping others to do the same. I am developing a consultancy in community health and nutrition and reproductive justice. The concept is a direct extension of NEBHDCo's skills training and supports."

NEBHDCo helped Nikki set pay standards, so that she receives a fair and livable wage for her work.

"I met the organization unsure of my next professional step and insecure in how well I was nourishing my family. In a little over a year, that has all been transformed."

The Community Chef training is just one program in a comprehensive place-based strategy to address community health and economic development through food called Communities for Healthy Food NYC. Launched in 2014 with technical assistance and funding through LISC NYC and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, this initiative integrates access to healthy, affordable food into every aspect of community development work—providing resident outreach, nutrition education, and cooking classes; creating new or improved healthy food outlets; and generating food-sector jobs.

Cornerstones of the CfHF program are community food advocates, who serve as "boots on the ground" in each target neighborhood to lead planning, program management, stakeholder development, and advocacy efforts.

WHY COMMUNITIES FOR HEALTHY FOOD?

NEBHDCo's deep relationships within the community, plus its existing property assets, including the Golden Harvest Food Pantry and two community gardens where residents were already growing fresh vegetables and fruits, made a strong foundation for partnering with LISC to design and launch a CfHF initiative in Central Brooklyn. Starting in 2012, NEBHDCo started transforming its "packed-bag" Golden Harvest Food Pantry, which had served the community for over twenty years, into a client-choice pantry, improving participants' shopping experience while increasing their access to healthy foods. The pantry and its backyard community garden were poised to become a hub for the CfHF initiative.

Bedford-Stuyvesant is among the most rapidly gentrifying communities in New York City. NEBHDCo works closely with development and community partners to help lower-income residents secure affordable housing and services in an increasingly expensive environment. Early on, NEBHDCo saw CfHF as an opportunity to make the local food system more equitable. The hypothesis the team hoped to prove at the start was that with resources and training, Bed-Stuy residents could become good food champions by educating their neighbors, starting community-owned businesses and leading change.

"What's most exciting is the potential CfHF holds to create a good model for community development amidst rapid gentrification here in Bedford-Stuyvesant."

—BIANCA BOCKMAN,
Community Food Advocate at NEBHDCo

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

To bolster the impact of their existing initiatives, NEBHDCo researched programs with similar missions, remaining mindful of Bedford-Stuyvesant's specific need for skill building and meaningful employment. The effort evolved into five program areas:



ADVOCACY AND
COMMUNITY
BUILDING



HEALTHY
FOOD ACCESS



URBAN FARMING
AND
GARDENING



CULINARY AND
NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE
SHARING



GOOD FOOD
JOBS



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

After considering how best to use their building assets to support CfHF programming, NEBHDCo invested in a demonstration kitchen upstairs from the Golden Harvest Food Pantry.

Since 2013, the community kitchen has been home to FEEST (Food Empowerment Education and Sustainability Team). The FEEST

program pays a stipend to a small group of youth leaders to train in facilitation, cooking, food justice history and practice and critical thinking skills.

The youth leaders then design and lead monthly dinners where they improvise a meal from scratch and engage in discussions and activities around food and other social justice issues.



HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

NEBHDCo helped bring a much needed farmers market to the neighborhood through a partnership with Harvest Home Farmer's Market. The market is located in an area with heavy foot traffic, in front of a playground and outside a subway stop. They accept SNAP/ EBT cards, Women Infant and Children (WIC) checks , Farmer's Market Nutrition Coupons (FMNP) and Health Bucks.

NEBHDCo also partnered with the Central Brooklyn Food Coop to establish a member run food coop in Bed-Stuy that will center on the needs and leadership of low-moderate income residents of color.



“We cooked food together, we ate food together, and had conversations or activities during the meal around an environmental justice topic we chose.”

—**BIANCA BOCKMAN,**
Community Food Advocate at
NEBHDCo



GOOD FOOD JOBS

NEBHDCo connects community chefs with paid cooking and catering jobs at NEBHDCo and partner organizations and ensures that chefs can find employment on their own. Through the Good Food Jobs initiative, NEBHDCo hosts professional development workshops to help community chefs by refining their skills and introducing new pathways.

NEBHDCo partners with The Working World to offer training, technical

assistance, and financing to businesses and entrepreneurs so they can establish themselves as Worker-Owned Co-ops.

In 2014, NEBHDCo hosted two introductory worker co-op workshops and in 2015, a 10-week cooperative business development course for 45 participants. Through these opportunities, three worker cooperatives were launched: Skeddadle Pest Control, Bed-Stuy Fresh and Local, and The Brooklyn Packers.



URBAN FARMING AND GARDENING

With the help of GrowNYC, underutilized land owned by NEBHDCo was transformed into four operational gardens. The gardens are a place for participants to work together to provide vegetables for the client-choice pantry, community chef

cooking demonstrations, and events and programs.

The TurnUp Youth Garden Internship Program, allows youth to learn firsthand about the opportunities that gardening and growing food offers. Youth receive a stipend for their efforts.



CULINARY AND NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE SHARING

NEBHDCo's Community Chef program promotes knowledge sharing among community members. Twenty three chefs taught over 120 cooking demonstrations and courses for adults, families and seniors. During these sessions, residents experience the joy of cooking and sharing food, learn to cook from scratch, and explore the local food system.



BED-STUY FRESH AND LOCAL

In 2014, Dylan Richards and Sheila Akbar, opened a fresh food grocery store in an area of Bed-Stuy that did not have readily available fresh produce. The store features produce and food items grown and/or produced locally. Richards and Akbar are committed to hiring staff from the community, particularly young people who have experienced challenges with the criminal justice system. Dylan, Sheila and their team have converted the store to a worker-owned cooperative model, using the knowledge and connection gained from participating in one of NEBHDCo's Cooperative Business introductory workshops. The store is now co-owned, staffed, and managed by people from the community living up to its original mission of greater community ownership of the local food system.

"Before the Coop, I called Bed-Stuy home for many years, but with the store, I'm really proud."

—DYLAN RICHARDS

FUNDING

NEBHDCo has sought funding to sustain and strategically grow programming. A USDA grant for \$375,000 tripled the work the community chef program can take on by paying for a part-time position. The position was filled by a community chef. A \$15,000 grant from Ample Table for Everyone allowed community chefs to conduct 60 cooking demonstrations in 20 weeks. Following these cooking

demonstrations, the NYC Department of Health hired community chefs to do more work at early child care centers. This has become a regular part of the program. NEBHDCo now partners with Bed-Stuy Restoration Corp, another community development corporation in the area, on their Farm to Early Childcare project to offer cooking demonstrations at participating sites.



OUTCOMES

NEBHDCo has been stringent in evaluating the reach and sustainability of their programs. In doing so, they have been able to work with participants to build on employable skills.

NEBHDCo's youth programs, TurnUp Garden and FEEST, provide young people with opportunities to learn professional job skills, responsibility, and resume and cover letter writing expertise. Learning from the Food Project in Boston has allowed NEBHDCo to adapt their program to better fit the students' changing schedules and serve youth year after year as their building, gardening, and harvesting skills evolve.

NEBHDCo employees have marveled at the development in young people's employability and their personalities.

Youth participants have evolved from shy and quiet individuals into confident leaders who can own a room.

The Community Chef Program and Good Food Jobs together have raised awareness of the benefits of gardening and healthy eating. Participants have found cooking and gardening can be enjoyable and profitable.

The Worker Owned Co-op Program has inspired residents and created a foundation for three new worker cooperatives.

Participants in NEBHDCo's Healthy Food and Living work often report that having access to fresh food, and knowledge about how to store and cook the food, encourages their families to eat more nutritious diets, helping them live healthier, more active lifestyles.

LOOKING FORWARD

As NEBHDCo continues to expand their food-related skill building and employment tracks, they also hope to increase employment opportunities among adults and youth.



NEBHDCo plans to expand upon its leadership development resources by offering more political education, advocacy and organizing skill building.

Given more space, NEBHDCo envisions extending its urban agriculture efforts to include an aquaponics program to increase the skill set of youth and healthy, culturally appropriate proteins that can be served to clients in their pantry and at local grocers.



Overall, NEBHDCo's programming will expand opportunities for residents to not only access more nutritious foods, but also take part in reshaping and ultimately owning the food system.



For now, while NEBHDCo works along side the community to reclaim its food system, community members benefit from healthy activity, nutritious food, and encouragement to work toward enjoyable employment.

BEST PRACTICES/ADVICE



Advocacy is critical. The team invested in outreach and community planning activities including surveys and focus groups. As the initiative progressed, it was clear that a deeper level of resident engagement through advocacy was needed for long-term community engagement and ownership.

Partnerships with service providers were very important at the beginning, particularly to not reinvent the wheel with training curriculum. Over time, NEBHDCo has developed its own curriculum to meet the needs in the community and take programs to a higher level.

Growing income opportunities into career possibilities. The success of the community chef and youth intern programs lies in the fact that NEBHDCo is continually seeking work opportunities inside and outside the organization for the 23 trained community chefs. And NEBHDCo staff seek to provide work requiring greater skill levels to keep residents engaged and set them up for future job possibilities.

The inventory of community real estate and human assets made a big difference. A better understanding of their assets helped NEBHDCo expand on its current programs and determine how to better use underutilized spaces through new program development.

