

CYPRESS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

CYPRESS HILLS AND EAST NEW YORK, BROOKLYN



ABOUT CYPRESS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) aims to build a strong, sustainable Cypress Hills and East New York neighborhood, where youth and adults achieve educational and economic success, secure healthy and affordable housing, and develop leadership skills to transform their lives and community. Local residents and merchants founded CHLDC in 1983 after a period of rapid change, community disinvestment, flight of long-time residents, and loss of local businesses that devastated the Fulton Street commercial strip. The organization has grown from one-program and an annual budget of \$35,000 to six program divisions serving 10,000 people a year, with a budget of over \$14 million.



Ms. Jeffries is a 52-year-old Cypress Hills resident and a regular shopper at the Pitkin Verde Farmers Market, where she has engaged in weekly cooking demonstrations and nutrition workshops.

Recently, she remarked to the nutrition educator that her kids had not been used to eating fresh fruits and vegetables, but that the workshops taught her different ways to prepare her meals and make them more nutritious.

With the culinary knowledge she gained at the market, Ms. Jeffries and her kids have started to enjoy fruits and vegetables so much that they prepare meals together. “This is a turnaround moment for my family,” said Ms. Jeffries. CHLDC hopes to create more such turnaround moments throughout the community.

The Pitkin Verde Farmers Market is just one part of a comprehensive place-based strategy to address resident health and economic development through food called Communities for Healthy Food NYC (CfHF). Launched at Cypress Hills in 2014 with technical



assistance and funding through LISC NYC and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, this initiative integrates access to healthy and affordable food into every aspect of community development work—providing resident outreach, nutrition education, and cooking classes, and creating new or improved healthy food outlets. 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?

Cypress Hills Verde is CHLDC's initiative to make Cypress Hills a greener, healthier, and more sustainable place to live. Under the Verde umbrella, CHLDC has been active in the evolution of East NY farmers markets, supported community gardens, provided nutrition education in schools, and launched a Youthmarket in collaboration with GrowNYC, LISC, and NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

There was a strong foundation in place for a healthy food initiative and CHLDC was already committed to bringing a full-service grocery store to the neighborhood to address food gaps. There is a significantly higher rate of obesity for adults in East New York, 38% versus 24% for the city as a whole and adults in East New York are twice as likely to have diabetes as the average adult in New York City. Access to healthy food and good food jobs also featured prominently in a community design process supported through a New York State Brownfield Opportunity Study. The CHLDC team was eager to work with LISC NYC to empower community members to get the food they need in their own neighborhood at affordable prices.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

CfHF has focused on creating strong neighborhood hubs that provide access to healthy food, nutrition education, community building, job skills development, and economic opportunities for residents. These hubs include farmers markets, urban farms and community gardens.



HEALTHY
FOOD ACCESS



URBAN FARMING
AND
GARDENING



CULINARY AND
NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE
SHARING



GOOD FOOD
JOBS



SCHOOL
PROGRAMS

URBAN FARMING AND GARDENING

CHLDC's Urban Agriculture Program supports half a dozen community gardens. Since its launch in 2013, CHLDC and residents have built four new gardens. The People's Garden, with dozens of beds for residents and local school kids, a chicken coop, a greenhouse, composting, and rainwater collection, is the program's crown jewel. A more recent success is the Chestnut Garden where in 2017 at-risk students

from Lyons Community School built a gazebo for residents in collaboration with Urban Workshop.

Urban agriculture efforts depend on partners—East New York Farms, Greenthumb, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, Grow NYC and New York Restoration Project—who helped build the community gardens and provide ongoing technical support.



"Gardens have become a source for local produce and a space for the community to come together. The gardens are real neighborhood assets which beautify Cypress Hills and East New York and provide economic development and leadership development opportunities."

-MICHELLE NEUGEBAUER,
Executive Director of CHLDC

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

CHLDC partners with local schools to increase the exposure of over 3,700 youth to healthy eating education and events, gardening opportunities, culinary instruction, and fresh produce. Community chefs led healthy cooking demos and nutrition education workshops at PS 677. A youth food justice program was integrated into afterschool programs for grades K-8 at PS 7, PS 89, and IS 171/Highland Park Community School. The program includes urban agriculture lessons, discussions on food justice issue, and design and implementation of community service projects.

During the fall of 2015, Groundswell artists worked with 11 high school students at the new Cypress Hills Community School on the Franklin K. Lane campus to create a food justice mural. Over 16 weeks, CHLDC staff and residents presented on nutrition, the impact of sugary drinks, gardening, and food justice. These themes are represented by students in the resulting mural—two matching sets of canvasses each with a depiction of unhealthy eating and community gardens.



CULINARY AND NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Education takes place at afterschool programs, adult day programs, the Cypress Hills Senior Center, and farmers market, farmstand and community garden food hub sites. Community Educators, trained to teach others how to cook and the benefits of eating nutritious foods, lead educational programs along with CHLDC staff. For example, educators helped create a 10-week soccer program that integrates healthy food and nutrition education into practices and games. The team also has created a “Fulton Food Guide” of healthy eating options along the neighborhood’s main corridor. Educational programming also includes farmers market tours and community garden walks.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Cypress Hills Youthmarket, a partnership with Greenmarket, GrowNYC, is in its seventh season. The youth-run farm stand provides a wide variety of locally-grown produce to residents at its high-traffic location outside the Cypress Hills Senior Center on Fulton Street, the community’s main commercial area.

To expand access to locally-grown foods, CHLDC opened the Pitkin Verde Farmers Market in July 2015 at HHC East New York Diagnostic and Treatment Center. The market supports two regional farmers each week and community-based farmers through its shared market table.

These markets reflect strong collaboration across different programs at CHLDC, acting as information hubs to promote a wide variety of community resources such as access to SNAP,

details on exercise and nutrition classes, voter registration, immigration support, housing energy retrofit opportunities, and other CHLDC services.

CHLDC participates in NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Shop Healthy Program to increase healthy food options in retail food stores. To date, 85 stores have been introduced to the program. Of these, thirty-six have joined.

For example, Conuquito Fruits and Vegetables now sells natural drinks and smoothies. Shahboob, located near neighborhood school PS 65, has added cut fruits and vegetables to go, salads, and smoothies. Tavares, a local Dominican restaurant, now offers a special meal deal they call the Power Plate that includes lots of nutritious vegetables for \$5.

GOOD FOOD JOBS

Trained by staff from JustFood and East NY Farms, NYC-based food justice organizations, Community Educators are paid to hold cooking demonstrations at farmers markets and community gardens. In the first year CHLDC was able to train a cohort of 14 Community Educators and in year 2, a cohort of 18 Community Educators.

The Pitkin Verde Farmers Market offers employment opportunities to residents—a farmers market manager, youth to operate and run the market, and community chefs. Similarly, the Cypress Hills Youth Market employs 4 to 5 young people each season. These youth learn how to run a business, math skills, customer service, and about local food systems.



CHLDC YOUTH MARKET: JHON ZHIMNAY

Jhon Zhimnay has been a part of the Cypress Hills Youthmarket in partnership with GrowNYC for seven years. He first became involved when his mother brought him to an after-mass gathering at the Beacon Family Center. Jhon has since been promoted to assistant manager at the Youthmarket. He helps manage the youth workers and customer relations at the market and has record-keeping and financial responsibilities in the GrowNYC office. “These are all great qualities to put on a resume,” says Jhon, noting that he believes his work with so many different people at the market will prepare him for his future career in law enforcement.

Jhon has seen firsthand how the market has transformed the lives of community members, especially those who live at the Senior Center. According to Jhon, some ladies hang out all day. They go inside to do activities, but keep coming back to talk about the food and shop together.

“It took a long time for people to realize that we weren’t there to overcharge them, we really just want to help them buy fresh food. Once people realized how much better our food was than what is at the stores here, they started to shop at the market every week.”

—JHON ZHIMNAY

FUNDING

In addition to funding through LISC and NYC Council discretionary funds, CHLDC has been very successful in leveraging their momentum with their Verde initiative and specifically their urban agriculture projects and programs to expand their community food efforts. In 2013, CHLDC received a three-year USDA grant for \$324,093. They have also secured local grants such as the \$50,000 from the Levitt Foundation and a \$10,000 grant from NYS Department of Agriculture.

With grants ending, fundraising is a priority and planning is ongoing. Planning for farmers markets in particular takes resources as markets involve insurance, government, promotion, hiring staff, maintaining relationships, and securing farmers. With program growth, administration time grows. Ongoing grants are ideal. CHLDC also notes the need to rely more on volunteers and have a more consistent volunteer program in place which works best with a strong stipend program.



OUTCOMES

- 🌿 In 2017 Cypress Hills operated two farmers markets. The CHLDC Youthmarket was the second highest grossing Youthmarket in NYC out of the 15 operated in partnership with Greenmarket selling 24,439 pounds of produce which resulted in sales of \$38,515. Pitkin Verde sold over 5,000 pounds of produce.
- 🌿 Across their two markets, CHLDC hosted 76 cooking demos, and the NYC DOHMH hosted an additional 92 demos. Both markets collected compost totaling 1,762 pounds.
- 🌿 Five local young people received training to work at the Youthmarket, and 27 participants earned ServSafe credentials in food service through CHLDC’s CHAMPION employment and training program.
- 🌿 CHLDC and partners have secured an operator for a new full-service supermarket that will open in 2018.
- 🌿 The youth leadership projects have inspired broad community engagement and created very visible impact. Projects include the mural at Cypress Hills Community School, the gazebo at Chestnut Garden and the seasonal Youthmarket
- 🌿 There are small important changes that demonstrate a larger mental shift toward healthier eating, such as more residents attending garden get-togethers and bringing water drinks infused with fruit and herbs rather than sugary soda.
- 🌿 Access to healthy food options has improved at 36 bodegas in the neighborhood who have started to provide items such as salads and smoothies as participants in NYC Department of Health’s Shop Healthy Program.

LOOKING FORWARD



The CHLDC team plans to involve more food vendors in the Pitkin Verde Farmers Market. Integration of programs would also benefit community members.



CHLDC will build on the three focus areas of Verde—Food Access and Healthy Living, Urban Agriculture and Small Home Energy Retrofitting—to create skilled living wage work while improving the health and livability of the community.

There are plans to bring more bodega (corner store) and restaurant owners into the Shop Healthy efforts so there are more nutritious foods available through traditional retail businesses and restaurants.



The Pitkin-Berriman affordable housing development will complete construction in Spring 2018 and will include a supermarket with healthy and affordable food options for the neighborhood.



CHLDC, along with Mutual Housing New York and Urban Builders Collaborative, recently won a city contract to develop 275 units of affordable housing in Cypress Hills. Plans include a rooftop garden, food incubator and health and nutrition programming.

BEST PRACTICES/ADVICE

Learn from what does not work. For example, Canasta Verde, a fresh food box program was “tried twice” and eventually abandoned. Residents found the bag twice as expensive as stores and a separate grocery stop inconvenient. It was hard for people to commit for the whole season and not have choice in vegetable selection. CHLDC was nimble enough to quickly change gears by directing community members to the farmers market through organized resident walks. Once at

the market, residents could buy produce of their own choosing and take advantage of SNAP incentives to get more produce for their dollar.

Build on what works. Youthmarket is a great example of a sustainable program that is well staffed, sufficiently funded, and providing part-time jobs. The team used learning from Youthmarket to successfully plan and launch the Pitkin Verde Farmers Market.

Residents responded well to fitness classes. Combining fitness and nutrition classes increased participation in the nutrition workshops and other food access programs.

Bringing in tools such as HealthBucks (SNAP incentives) also drew people to workshops and the farmers markets where they could purchase fresh produce. It took time to figure out what motivated residents to keep coming back.

