

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Youth Envision: Bayview Hunters Point Food Study

The Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood is located in Southeast San Francisco. It is one of the fastest growing and most ethnically diverse areas in the city, and also among the poorest. The goal of the Bayview Hunters Point Food Study was to identify and promote strategies for improving access to nutritious food in the neighborhood, while also providing job training for community trainees and youth interns.

In March 2001 the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Section (EHS) began a partnership in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood with a community-based organization, the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG). EHS approached SLUG because they had long been active in urban agriculture and food security projects in this neighborhood. In turn, SLUG engaged in a collaboration with Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) to develop a youth program around food security issues in the Bayview Hunters Point. A participatory action model was used to train youth in the skills and resources needed to investigate food security in their neighborhood. EHS provided technical instruction and assistance, as well as support to SLUG and LEJ project staff on action research methods. SLUG and LEJ coordinated the youth interns.

The total budget for the study was approximately \$20,000, plus significant in-kind time from EHS and SLUG's Youth Internship Program. The assessment project was funded by the Department of Public Health, while additional funding for the youth interns was provided by other city agencies. The steering committee consisted of the Director of Urban Agriculture at SLUG and members of the Department of Public Health's Environmental Health and Nutrition Sections. Decisions about data and reports were made by the steering committee.

Project staff working with EHS and the youth participants created a questionnaire focused on identifying ways to increase access to nutritious food. The survey sought information on where people were getting their food, the barriers to purchasing healthy foods, and changes that would help people to purchase healthy foods.

Youth empowerment was a significant aspect of the project. The youth developed their own recommendations, work plan, and deliverables with the help of project staff. The youth program combined learning about the food system with community actions such conducting outreach for a new farmers' market in the neighborhood, and community mapping of food assets. Youth were trained in survey methods, data analysis, health impact assessment, public communications, and other areas. Seventeen youth advocates collected survey responses from more than 280 individuals in their neighborhood. Survey locations included grocery stores, churches, community colleges, a post office, and a fast food restaurant.

The youth then worked with staff to analyze the survey data and create a list of recommendations to improve food access in Bayview Hunters Point. The four strategies identified as most helpful by survey respondents were the following:

1. Creation or improvement of a grocery store/supermarket
2. Creation of a neighborhood farmers' market
3. Better quality food on shelves of corner stores
4. Healthy fast food retailers

The youth interns shared their research findings widely through meetings and presentations with residents, community organizations, and service providers. At this writing, action plans have been developed for the local farmers' market and corner stores, and a plan for a new or improved grocery store is underway.

Other outcomes include:

w SLUG youth interns and staff created a new Bayview Community Farmers Market as a community development project. Youth have assisted with outreach, vendor relations, and market operations.

w Some corner store owners have made a commitment to stock a minimum amount of fresh food. Youth interns have conducted healthy snack taste tests at the farmers' market, and the results have been incorporated into an action plan for the corner stores. The Department of Public Health awarded a \$100,000 grant to the Youth Envision Project to continue the youth work with the corner stores.

w The city's transit authority agreed to provide new shuttle routes directly from the community to food sources.

w Neighborhood youth gained new skills and empowerment through job training and by working to educate and serve their community.

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