

Re/Storing Nashville

Building a faith-based movement to increase low-income residents' access to full-service grocery stores

SUMMARY

From 2008 through 2011, Re/Storing Nashville sought to address childhood obesity in three low-income neighborhoods—Edgehill, North Nashville and East Nashville—by increasing access to full-service grocery stores.¹

The targeted neighborhoods are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as "food deserts," where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain. With limited public transportation, round-trips to full-service grocery stores can take more than three hours, according to Project Director Miriam Leibowitz. In some sections of the community, obesity rates approach 50 percent.

The project had these key objectives:

- Building a broad, faith-based movement to address the problem of obesity among the community's most vulnerable children
- Securing transportation, zoning and economic development policy changes that would encourage healthy food retail establishments to locate in the target neighborhoods
- Using the Internet and social media to shift the focus of the conversation about childhood obesity from individual to community responsibility
- Reaching a national audience through "What's Your Calling" video project which highlighted community members working together to create access to healthy, affordable food in Nashville

Re/Storing Nashville staff worked with a coalition of partners, including interfaith and social service groups, community centers and food banks.

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¹ Re/Storing Nashville began as a project of Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee, based in Nashville. The first RWJF grant (ID# 065332) went to Vanderbilt University, which served as fiscal agent to Food Security Partners until its merger with Manna, a 35-year-old Nashville-based anti-hunger advocacy organization. Community Food Advocates, created from the merger, received RWJF grant ID# 067318.

Context

This project was funded under a May 2008 solicitation for proposals from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) entitled Faith-Based Advocacy: Galvanizing Communities to End Childhood Obesity. The grants funded under the solicitation support faith-based coalitions that advance community policies and environmental changes that improve access to healthy foods and/or opportunities for physical activity. See *galvanizing-communities.com* for more information. Also see the Introduction.

RESULTS

Community Food Advocates reported to RWJF that it had:

- Built an interfaith movement in the targeted Nashville neighborhoods to raise
 awareness and take action on food-related issues. More than 90 houses of worship
 were reached through conversations with clergy members, participation in a speakers'
 bureau or incorporating information about food access and food policy into their
 sermons, study groups or outreach activities. Among other activities, project staff:
 - Developed and disseminated a 75-page toolkit, From Charity to Justice: Building a Healthy and Equitable Food System Through Faith and Community Action
 - Engaged more than 100 Nashville-area middle and high school students in interfaith dialogue and leadership training, using the "Breaking Bread Leadership Curriculum" created as part of the project
- Promoted policy and environmental changes, working in partnership with neighborhood groups. Among other activities, project staff:
 - Identified and trained a leadership team of seven women living in the targeted neighborhoods who helped to mobilize other residents
 - Helped to develop the Nashville Mobile Market, a mobile grocery store that initially served Edgehill and then expanded to East Nashville
 - Brokered a relationship between the Turnip Truck Market, a natural foods store in Edgehill, and a neighborhood group that led the market to invest in a community garden
 - Educated state legislators about food deserts, and studied the impact of transportation on access to food, with the help of focus groups and students from Vanderbilt University
 - Developed a comprehensive proposal to attract new grocery stores, and presented it to city officials

- Advocated for incorporating food-access policies into planning processes undertaken by the Metro Transit Authority, the Metro Housing and Development Authority, Nashville's Poverty Reduction Initiative, and other public entities
- Developed proposals to community centers, the Metropolitan Transportation
 Authority and others to strengthen transportation options—including a weekly
 grocery bus, changes in bus routes and vans to connect residents with grocery
 stores
- Encouraged Save-a-Lot and other grocery chains to locate in the target neighborhoods
- Consulted with a local grocery developer, a real estate firm, a community center and the YMCA to improve an East Nashville convenience store
- Used media outreach and communication tools to shift the conversation about childhood obesity to emphasize community responsibility. Dozens of stories about the project have run in print, radio and television outlets, and a video about the project, produced by RWJF, is available online. Among other activities, project staff also:
 - Developed the Re/Storing Nashville Web site, which included news and information about the project, resources and "Grocery Stories," in which neighborhood residents describe their efforts to shop for healthy foods
 - Established a blog, a Facebook page and a Twitter site
 - Made presentations to community groups—including the League of Women Voters, the Sierra Club and Hadassah— and to the Community Food Security Coalition, a national body that links 300 organizations

Lessons Learned

- Identifying leaders should be a bottom-to-top process. Due to time constraints, members of the leadership team were identified by community partners, rather than emerging through a more organic process, and they were not diverse by either age or gender. (Project Director/Leibowitz)
- 2. **Issues of food access are symptoms of deeper problems.** "Getting healthy food into the neighborhoods is barely scratching the surface," said Leibowitz. "It is one piece of a larger group of issues including lack of jobs and the institutional racism that helped to create Nashville's food deserts."

Funding

RWJF supported this project from December 2008 to November 2009 and from February 2010 to February 2011 with two grants totaling \$224,994.

Afterward

Although project activities ended with the second grant, the resources of Re/Storing Nashville's Web site remain available and some of its advocacy activities have shown results. For example, the Save-a-Lot discount grocery chain has opened a new store in North Nashville and the Nashville Food Policy Council, a coalition of policy-makers and local consumer, faith-based and business leaders, has identified food deserts as a policy priority.

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Articles

Non-Journal Articles

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Issue or Policy Briefs

Re/Storing Nashville. "Food Transit Assessment Summary." Available online.

Charts or Data

Maps

Padgett D. *Nashville's Food Deserts* (map). Nashville, TN: Community Food Advocates, 2009.

Education or Toolkit

Curricula

Bailey J. *Breaking Bread: Engaging Religiously Diverse Youth in the Nashville Food Justice Movement* (resource manual). Nashville, TN: Community Food Advocates, 2010. Available from grantee.

Toolkits, Toolboxes or Primers

Bailey J, Campbell M and Leibowitz M. From Charity to Justice: Building a Healthy and Equitable Food System Through Faith and Community Action (toolkit). Nashville, TN: Community Food Advocates, 2011.

Communications or Promotions

Grantee Web sites

www.restoringnashville.org. Web site describing program and designed to educate Nashville residents and policy-makers about the city's food deserts and ways to increase food access there. Includes "grocery stories," anecdotes from local residents about their efforts to find healthy foods.

Communications or Promotions

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sn4QAY7UvDA. Promotional video posted on YouTube. Some 79 views as of July 14, 2011.