Cultivating Youth and Communities for Positive Futures

In its 3rd year of funding, the Cultivating Youth and Communities for Positive Futures New Communities Project is designed to build the capacity of children and youth in at-risk communities to become healthy and contributing citizens of their local communities. This program utilizes the collaborative expertise of Extension professionals in the areas of youth development, family and community health sciences and agriculture to develop and deliver experiential education programs in partnership with local schools and community-based organizations. Horticulture and gardening, food and nutrition and entrepreneurship are the primary subject matter areas utilized in the delivery of programs.

Pre-K children through youth age 21 in Atlantic City and high school age youth identified as special needs students from Woodbury and Paulsboro acquire and practice skills which enhance workforce readiness, promote the development of healthy lifestyles and demonstrate civic responsibility.

Roots of Knowledge
Atlantic County

Roots of Knowledge focused on the objectives of improving science literacy through gardening, increasing healthy lifestyle practices through nutrition education and improving workforce readiness and life skills in low socio-economic, at risk youth pre-K through age 21.

Entrepreneurship/Workforce Readiness

The Uptown Classic Produce Market youth farmstand completed its third year of operation. A second farmstand, T.E.A.M., opened in Pleasantville in partnership with Salem Methodist Church in Pleasantville. A total of 25 employees were trained and assessed on workforce readiness through the completion of weekly business record forms provided in the draft “Daily Operations Manual” as part of the RCRE Youth Farmstand Program manual (draft).

Three Parent Resource Centers participated in the Babysitting Course in afterschool programs. 36 youth, in grades 6 – 8 successfully graduated the 10-week program. Youth learned babysitting discipline, baby proofing, dealing with different ages, types of healthy foods to feed, and the “Rules” of babysitting.

32 older youth interviewed for potential employees at the 2nd annual Horticultural Job Fair. Local businesses and community
colleges posted available job positions and the program included a Plant Identification and Weed Identification Contest. Throughout the expanded two-day program classes were offered on Spanish for Landscapers, Native Plants, Employee Retention & Motivation, Marketing your Business, and for pesticide credits.

Science Literacy
120 students in three Atlantic City elementary schools learned how to match fruits, vegetables, and seeds to plant parts, place garden grown choices into appropriate food groups, and plant/seed needs.

22 fourth grade students learned about plant structure, basic requirements for growth; how soil helps most plants meet basic needs; and that plants produce their own food. This indoor gardening program assists youth in developing an inquiring mind and encourages them to use science and creative and critical thinking skills.

55 campers age 5-12 learned about solutions and suspensions, identifying bases and acids, working with fats and proteins, and using proper ingredients in recipes for baking in Kitchen Chemistry Summer Day Camp Program which relates chemistry to foods and cooking.

Nutrition and Fitness/Healthy Lifestyles
55 campers, ages 5-12 learned proper nutrition and physical activity for healthy living during the Food and Fitness Fun Summer Day Camp Program which focused on the Food Guide Pyramid.

8 teens and 4 adults from Youth Corps learned basic nutrition education, focusing on fresh produce in anticipation of the summer farmstand program in the Get Energized training program.

17 students in 5th grade were introduced to food safety through Fight BAC CD Education Pilot Program – to evaluate effectiveness of self-education through technology. Youth learned to wash hands properly, wash hands and utensils before, after, or both when doing certain activities in or out of the kitchen, why meat and eggs need to be thoroughly cooked, and proper way to defrost foods.

Gardening/Appreciation of Environment
5 Master Gardeners worked with a resident of Drew Apartments and two Atlantic City Housing Authority staff in setting up a residents/community garden, and will provide on-going training to residents. The Master Gardeners also presented a series of three 2 hour workshops to a total of 30 local Atlantic City residents on growing and maintaining herbs, annuals and perennials and four season gardens.

3 sites in Atlantic City established wildlife habitat areas in Atlantic City in partnership with the Special Improvement District (Uptown Deli, York-Hunter Building, and Maine Avenue) where 1000 native grasses and 50 bayberry bushes were planted.

ROOTS OF KNOWLEDGE STAFF

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Thomas Russo
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Frank Sutton
Seeds to Success
Gloucester County

The Seeds to Success project primarily targets at-risk high school age special needs youth from the communities of Paulsboro and Woodbury. The major focus of the program is the development and practice of workforce readiness skills and related life skills as defined in the 1991 Department of Labor SCANS Report for teens between the ages of 14 and 18. Project staff taught youth topics in nutrition, financial basics and workforce readiness.

Workforce Readiness

During the 2005 summer season, an educational component was instituted during which the stand managers and/or RCRE staff provided weekly lessons and activities in areas of workforce preparation, food and nutrition education, produce identification and character education. All farmstand youth were taught the following 15 lessons over the course of eight weeks: using a scale, writing checks, price list, writing a resume, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, decision-making, fruit fly bingo, vegetable extravaganza, fruit salad scramble, vegetable scramble, and plan a meal.

Youth participated in a skill-a-thon on the last day of the week-long training held prior to farmstand operations, and again after the last day of business. Youth were tested on six skills: produce identification, use of a produce scale and knowledge of equivalent weights, knowledge of produce-related measurement terms, ability to make change and process government vouchers, properly bagging produce and use of a cash register. Youth achieved statistically significant improvements on total scores. The highest gains were registered in produce identification. Participants’ use of a produce scale and knowledge of equivalent weights also demonstrated significant improvement.

Impact

An exit interview was conducted with 16 youth during the second skill-a-thon. Several impacts were realized, including the following:

- 69% want to return for the summer of 2006.
- 56% have a bank account.
- 44% believe the youth farmstand helped others in the community.
- 38% learned how to operate a cash register and can make change.

Both farmstands returned to the 2004 locations. In Woodbury the farmstand remained on school property. In Paulsboro, the stand was reinstated at an existing strip mall.

This year, the farmstand program expanded to the community of Glassboro. Ten youth operated a successful farmstand in a city recently honored as a “Main Street” City, undergoing extensive planned revitalization. The Youth Farmstand Project addressed the need to provide fresh produce in the downtown area.

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Food Security – WIC and Senior Nutrition Voucher Recipients, Providing Nutritious Food

Seeds to Success generated total sales of $8,884 with 2,371 customers served during July and August. More importantly, however, in the third year of operation a broader number of community members are now aware of the project. At least 11% of total sales were attributed to voucher redemption by WIC.

Nutrition

As a result of nutrition education youth were able to:
• Identify the types of fruits and vegetables that were better sources of key nutrients like fiber and vitamin C (consumption of which are attributed to reducing risk of chronic disease).
• Identify one new method of preparing a nutritious snack using a locally grown fruit.
• Distinguish between locally and non-locally grown produce.
• Identify the types of fruits and vegetables that were better sources of specific nutrients.
• Explain how to appropriately clean fruits and vegetables prior to eating.
• Identify one new method of preparing a nutritious snack using a locally grown vegetable.

Financial Basics

69 students participated in FUNdamental Finance where youth successfully learned how to correctly complete a bank check and deposit slip.