

COMMUNITY FOOD ACTION NEW SETTLEMENT APARTMENTS

MT. EDEN, BRONX



ABOUT NEW SETTLEMENT APARTMENTS

New Settlement Apartments has been increasing access to safe and affordable housing, high-quality education, opportunities for healthy living, and fair employment in the southwest Bronx for 25 years. Grounded in its commitment to a thriving neighborhood, New Settlement collaborates with residents and partners to create services that celebrate the dignity and potential of community members. The organization provides a growing set of community-based services that benefits and empowers some 14,000 youth and adults each year. Its centerpiece is the newly built New Settlement Community Campus with public schools spanning pre-K through 12th grade, special education classrooms, a student health clinic, and a community center with an indoor swimming pool, dance studio, multi-purpose rooms, rooftop terrace, and cooking classroom.



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Avril Holland and her mother, Brenda Davis, have become more involved in their community through New Settlement's community food action programs.

In the spring of 2017, Avril attended several Stirring Up Community Change meetings, a food justice leadership group through Community Food Action at New Settlement. The guest speakers messages resonated with her. Chef Gabriela Alvarez led an activity connecting different aspects of life to health and wellness with a focus on how financial realities impact what people eat. Gregory Jost led a session on the history of the South Bronx, highlighting the red-lining that led to a systematic denial of resources, including healthy and affordable food, and current economic and social conditions in Avril and Brenda's neighborhood. "Oftentimes you feel alone when you're on a journey to wellness. What I appreciated about Stirring Up Community Change was the chance to meet people in the community who are like-minded and dedicated to food justice. It was inspiring and it pushed me on my journey," shared Avril.

The mother and daughter attended a trip upstate to McEnroe Organic Farm, where they were able to learn more about how food is produced and how it travels from farm to plate. After the trip, Brenda began regularly visiting New Settlement's youth-led 170 Farm Stand in Mt. Eden to purchase locally-grown produce and listen in on the Farmers Markets for Kids workshops to continue learning about healthy and local foods.

The youth-led farm stand and Stirring Up Community Change are just some of the programs in a comprehensive place-based strategy to address community health and economic development through food called Communities for Healthy Food (CfHF) NYC. New Settlement's umbrella CfHF Initiative is called Community Food Action. Launched in 2014 with technical assistance and funding through LISC NYC of New York City 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; 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?

“Rebuilding a neighborhood is much more than bricks and mortar work,” says Jack Doyle, executive director of New Settlement, of the days in the early 1990s when New Settlement acquired 14 vacant buildings in the Bronx neighborhood of Mount Eden. Devastated by disinvestment, arson, and abandonment, a gut renovation of the buildings transformed them into homes for 893 families. CfHF was a good fit for New Settlement because the Bronx is the unhealthiest county in New York State, in part because many residents are denied access to high quality food. At the same time, the Mount Eden neighborhood that New Settlement serves is a mix of rich cultures. Neighborhood residents carry agricultural and culinary traditions with them.

“The reason we do this work is because a lot of decisions that shape our food system are not made by those most affected by those decisions. We want to work with community members to shape their food system.”

—TAISY CONK,
Director of Community Food Action
at New Settlement



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Community Food Action takes a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to food justice in the neighborhood by embedding hands-on food education into local institutions, developing community leadership, and creating opportunities to grow, purchase, eat, and compost good food.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

New Settlement Community Campus high school students at CMSP 327 collaborated with Groundswell, an arts non-profit that uses art as a tool for social change. Artists helped students design and paint a mural called Fruits of Our Labor depicting the role food workers play to help feed the South Bronx. Additionally, New Settlement and the Center for Urban Pedagogy collaborated with Teaching Artist, Elma Relihan, and high school students from CMSP 327 to advocate for healthier school meals. To investigate, students got out of the classroom and into the cafeteria, surveying community

members and interviewing key decision makers on School Food and the Alternative Menu. The alternative menu offers more plant-based and fewer processed food items. Student research and advocacy culminated in *What's On Your Plate?*, a guide to school menu choices, to help communities influence the food served at public schools. Students relished the opportunity to have a say in issues like school food that directly affect them by conducting interviews with experts, leading presentations, and using their creativity and personal expertise through lived experiences to create final projects.





HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

New Settlement hosted a farm share for three summers and two winter seasons in partnership with Corbin Hill Food Project. It was challenging to sustain participation because shareholders were required to sign up in advance and could not choose the foods in each week's share.

The farm share experience paved the way for the July 2017 launch of New Settlement's, 170 Farm Stand, a youth run market, to provide high quality and fresh food from local farmers at fair and reasonable prices,

education on the value of seasonal eating, and food scraps composting. The Farm Stand accepts SNAP, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits, and Women, Infant and Children checks, and Health Bucks. Customers paying \$5 with SNAP receive a \$2 Health Buck. Youth leaders are responsible for set up, sales, customer service, and consumer education. The youth leaders also participate in wrap around education and youth leadership programming to further their learning and activism in contemporary food justice issues.



CULINARY AND NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Nutrition education, gardening workshops, cooking demonstrations, community events and healthy food resources are integrated into youth and after-school programs. New Settlement focuses on celebrating participants culture by sharing their traditional recipes and cooking techniques, and discussing seasonal ingredients. For example, the Bronx Helpers youth community service program, has engaged 135 middle and high school youth in food-focused projects. They implemented Junior Battle Chef, a cooking contest series for middle school students. They also developed a counter-marketing campaign around junk food, advocating with local grocers, and creating a magazine called "Quest for Justice."



"Being a youth leader and interacting with people of the local community allowed me to better communicate and learn to work with different types of people."

—DIAMONTE,
Farm Stand Youth Leader

URBAN FARMING AND GARDENING

New Settlement included gardens in their work because it helps restore the rights of marginalized communities to grow their own food. A rooftop garden was designed into the New Settlement Community Campus with a cooking classroom to enable community members to learn more about growing and cooking fresh produce. There is also gardening at PS 294 to expose kids to new vegetables and herbs and provide a peaceful and sensory place to explore. Foodcorps, a member of the AmeriCorps Service Network, provides New Settlement with a service member at PS 294 and Edible Schoolyard NYC with a service member at PS 311. The Members use the garden to teach students about growing and preparing healthy food.



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Since almost its inception, New Settlement has partnered with local schools and operated after school programs. They wanted to build on this work by integrating food justice and education into classrooms, gardens, cafeteria, family engagement, and student leadership.

Healthy food programs at PS 311 and PS 294 impact 900 students annually. Community Food Action's collaboration with the schools focuses on providing healthier school meals through NYC's more plant-based alternative menu.

PS 311 was awarded the Platinum Prize and PS 294 was awarded the Silver Prize for School Wellness by the NYC Office of School in recognition of their efforts to create environments that promote child health and academic achievement.

New Settlement, PS 295 and PS 311 are embedding health and wellness into the school's DNA through a tight network of partners. FoodCorps, Wellness in the Schools (WITS) and Edible Schoolyard NYC coordinate closely to deliver lessons on nutrition, cooking, and food culture and strengthen student and family engagement.

FUNDING

In addition to the core funding through LISC from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, New Settlement has secured foundation and public funding to support programming. For example, the organization secured \$35,000 annually for three years from the Levitt Foundation to fund culinary education in two afterschool programs and youth-led food justice projects. LISC also worked closely with New Settlement to secure \$125,000 annual funding from New York City Council. NSA also received funding from the NYC DOHMH's Nutrition Education at Farmers Markets Capacity Building Grant to implement nutrition education and cooking demos and Fresh Connect from NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to support the Farm Stand.



OUTCOMES

- In 2017, 177 local young people participated in Community Food Action programs that strengthened their knowledge of healthy food and food justice their advocacy and leadership skills.
- New Settlement engaged an estimated 6,500 residents through neighborhood outreach, awareness campaigning, and other events in 2017.
- New Settlement's work in schools has been successful because they share goals with partner schools and investment in the community's children. Their efforts with food and schools had impacted 900 students annually.
- Beyond New Settlement staff, the Community Food Action program now employs 14 residents, 4 adult and 8 youth farmstand employees, 1 adult intern, and a fulltime FoodCorps member.
- Youth staff at the 170 Farm Stand sold almost 10,000 pounds of food to over 2,100 community members at the farm stand and donated over 1,000 pounds of food to Siena House, a temporary home for mothers and their children. Staff also distributed 1,400 Health Bucks, NYC's SNAP incentive coupons.
- 1,196 total adults and children participated in 93 cooking and nutrition workshops.
- Discussions on how health and food disparities are a result of institutional racism and systematic oppression has resonated deeply with participants. Youth Leaders connected with lessons about the history of food as a tool for resistance, and became very engaged in a conversation about modern-day slavery in Libya, in which one Youth Leader pointed out that "nobody teaches us this, we have to learn through Snapchat". Young people are finding their own ways to learn about current issues, even if those means are limited, and their desire to learn more is evident.



LOOKING FORWARD



New Settlement plans to establish a multi-year tiered paid youth leadership program. Participants will be involved in all aspects of the 170 Farm Stand. Youth will have the option to stay in the program for multiple years, taking on new leadership roles each season.

There is concern about what rapid changes in the community will mean to long-time residents. Taisy Conk notes, “We’d like to delve more into how healthy food work can meet the needs of the current residents and what models best meet those needs and address systemic issues without contributing to future displacement.”



Continue expanding to new schools to create district-level impact and develop a guide that provides schools with incremental steps, checklists and tools to successfully create a school wide culture of health in the classroom, cafeteria and beyond. As Taisy Conk says, “We have heard from schools that they want to improve their food environment but can use support from experts to realize these goals. As an organization that is deeply invested in the Bronx, we think we can be an important force for driving change in the school district.”



FOOD EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY FOR THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

In 2015, Principal Dan Russo appointed Shannon Nilan, Literacy Coach, the Wellness Coordinator for the school. She says, “When we started the school in 2013, healthy food was not a concern. Through small steps, I’ve seen changes in attitudes not only in myself, but also in the principal and students. Now it’s embedded into the school culture. Even teachers think twice about bringing something unhealthy or ask if something is appropriate.” She has seen specific changes due to the fresh foods available to the students: “In the beginning the salad bar was not touched, but now, kids talk about what they like best from the bar. They come up to me and say, ‘Ms. Nilan, look at my healthy snack.’” Ms. Nilan believes these behavioral shifts are allowing children to lead healthier lives to reach their full potential.

BEST PRACTICES/ADVICE

- Finding specific models that work for New Settlement and its participants took some experimentation. For example, New Settlement was able to open a successful 170 Farmstand because the team used what they had already learned through their experience with Corbin Hill's Farm Share program.
- Funding Collaborations are critical. At PS 294, the school administration and New Settlement contribute to the budget and deploy staff and secure successful programs such as Wellness in the Schools.
- The work at PS 294 also demonstrates the benefits of taking incremental steps and listening to the needs of the school administration, teachers, students and parents. The growth from healthy food education to a full-time FoodCorps member at the school resulted from responding to the school's needs and requests rather than coming in with a pre-set agenda.
- Relying on community leadership, supporting new leadership development, and hiring well is very important. Resident engagement is core to this type of initiative and requires a specific skill set and understanding of the community.
- The success of an integrated multi-faceted food justice program is dependent on a Community Development Corporation's reach across age groups and a spectrum of programs. For example, to work with elementary, middle and high school students, New Settlement identified unique interests of each group and tailored programming to those interests.
- Advocacy work is important but it takes time to build the foundation. Campaigns need to be developed by community members, versus simply endorsing outside campaigns. The dialog it takes to build a campaign is extremely important.

