

Erie Family Health Center

GREATER CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

ACCESS, NUTRITION, EDUCATION AND PARTNERSHIP

During any given week, Erie Family Health Center's (EFHC's) calendar is filled with Zumba, swimming, line dancing, walking, low impact aerobics, yoga, meditation, cooking classes and more. Patients, staff and community find health care is a lot more about well-being than diagnostic codes and exam room encounters. Food security activities flow naturally from this design structure.

When EFHC CEO Lee Francis, MD, MPH, responded to NACHC's survey, he remarked that seeing all of their food activities in one listing helped him see the breadth

and depth of what they are doing. Like many community health centers that are fully engaged with their communities, it was easy to see the trees but not the forest they are growing. Food security efforts at EFHC include almost a dozen interventions that span child-centered to elderly-based activities. Building on existing strengths with their school-based health centers, EFHC started a community garden in a district designated as a food desert. The garden is part of the school health program, introducing children to

new foods while also building in nutrition and exercise components. As others with school gardens have said, sharing in the growing, cooking and eating of the food has transformed the children's food experiences.

Top Box Foods (see Top Box Foods in Food Oasis Partners At a Glance, p. 42) partners with EFHC to deliver boxes of fresh produce and frozen meat at deeply discounted prices. Patients, staff and community members preorder boxes, which are then delivered on a regular route every month. The center's kitchen is used to create sample meals from the boxed food selections. This mobile food program brings high quality grocery items into food deserts and is supported as a social enterprise. Future plans are to have a mobile food bank delivery route as a complementary food source.

Other food programs include Cooking Matters and diabetes prevention classes for Hispanic women. These programs include grocery store visits and meal planning. Children are offered the BALANCE program, focusing on nutrition education and the prevention of childhood obesity. Fun events such as mini marathons are also sponsored by EFHC.

With care like EFHC's, doctors may become obsolete!

Now celebrating its 60th anniversary, Erie Family Health Center serves 70,000 patients in 13 Chicago area locations. Community-based work is integral to their operations, with schools, kitchens, food depositories and community partners joining together to improve food security and health.



PARTICIPATING WITH TOP BOX FOODS IS A COMMUNITY AFFAIR FOR BOTH STAFF AND PATIENTS.

A SHIFT IN FOCUS

With 25 years' experience at Erie Family Health Center (EFCH), including work as an internist, CMO and CEO, Dr. Francis has seen special initiatives in health centers come and go. Health Disparities Collaboratives, Patient Centered Medical Homes, electronic health records and social determinants of health have all been in fashion. But in interviewing Dr. Francis, it's clear he sees wellness and health promotion as a community-based effort that encompasses the best of these initiatives and that outlasts any jargon-laden concepts.

An MPH trained staffer directs patient programs and support services. This includes most of the food security efforts. It also

encompasses the many exercise and mind-body fitness programs available, as well as nutrition and cooking classes. Programs are designed to be inclusive of all the different cultural groups at the center, from Hispanic women, to schoolchildren to African-American seniors. The fact that teaching kitchens are being incorporated into all new facilities enhances these efforts.

Like most centers, many staff are from target communities. By empowering the whole community, health outcomes are optimized for patients, staff and local families with children in local schools. Health promotion is not limited to a chronic disease or an age group but seen as the fundamental work of primary care.

INTERVENTIONS

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY GARDENS WITH CLASSES

FOOD BOX DELIVERY SITES

FOOD DEPOSITORY MOBILE PILOT

MULTIPLE WELL-BEING PROGRAMS THAT TARGET PATIENTS OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

TEACHING KITCHENS AND COOKING MATTERS

PARTNERS

CHICAGO FOOD DEPOSITORY

CHICAGO SCHOOLS

TOP BOX FOODS