

Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center

HERTFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

FARM TO SCHOOL TO HEALTHCARE

When Catherine Parker asked a class of high school students if anyone had ever been to a farmers market, only three students raised their hand. Then she asked how many students had eaten at a fast food restaurant that week. Every

hand went up. In fact, they had all been twice.

Parker and her team at Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center (RCCHC) changed those statistics this year with the implementation of Farm to School to Healthcare. In coordination with the schools as well as a host of community partners, RCCHC helped create and implement a food oasis in rural northeast North Carolina. Unlike most interventions, this one integrates youth into every aspect of the work.

Parker is the Director of the Hertford County Student Wellness Center, a school-based program of RCCHC. High school and early college students learn about food security as a social

justice and a health issue. School gardens at primary and high school levels are designed and constructed by the students. Literacy and writing classes incorporate farm and garden knowledge into the curriculum.

Approximately 125 students helped to build the gardens, earning credit for physical education hours. Volunteers from the community pitched in with materials and labor. Almost 100 students work to maintain the gardens.

The Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center's Farm to School to Healthcare Initiative recognizes that many things from family habits to geographic barriers to poverty and health literacy all impact health outcomes. Through youth-led gardens and markets, integrated nutrition education in the schools and construction of walking trails, the community landscape has literally been changed for good.



After building the garden and cultivating it, participants sell the produce at a student-run market. Early college students learn about small business operations by setting up displays, answering customer questions and preparing samples of healthy recipes from the produce for sale. Community partners assist the student education.

Student-run markets are set up at the health center. Patients in need receive Prescription Produce Vouchers, which allow them to purchase market produce in \$10 increments. Over 226 pounds of fresh produce was sold at the first market and a remaining 146 pounds donated to a local food pantry. Those

shopping at the center market said they'd shop this way again, with 80% stating it leads them to eat more fruits and vegetables and 40% believing it improves their health. Customers expressed gratitude for the market and optimism for the future based on the student-led concept.

Before the market, parents believed fresh produce was more costly than frozen or canned. More than half said they couldn't access fresh produce. With the markets at the center and the gardens at the schools, families in this rural North Carolina area are seeing fresh food options that are accessible and affordable.

CHANGING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

As health centers increasingly address social determinants of health in their populations, they are becoming innovators beyond the walls of the clinical buildings. From her office window at Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center (RCCHC), Catherine Parker could see three schools. However, none of the schools could be reached on foot. Ravines and other obstacles prevented anyone from walking between the schools and the center.

RCCHC received a grant to create an Americans with Disabilities Act compliant walking trail between the schools, the center and the Main Street sidewalks. True to their youth-led emphasis, the center had students name the trail. They

chose P.A.W.—Promoting Active Wellness—which also incorporates their school mascot, the Bears.

A school-wide Walk Day celebrated the trail construction. Approximately 775 students participated, logging over 500 combined miles. The primary school is building a garden alongside the trail, which will be incorporated into the garden-market program.

Not only school children, but also community patients of the center benefit from the trail. As there is a connection with Main Street, many patients can now walk to the center rather than drive. This example of changing the built environment is one that can have an enormous impact on improving health outcomes.

INTERVENTIONS

A FARM TO SCHOOL TO HEALTHCARE INITIATIVE WITH SEVERAL SCHOOL GARDENS AND A YOUTH LEAD MARKET BUILT IN A FOOD DESERT

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JUSTICE, BUSINESS, HEALTH, FITNESS AND MORE

PRESCRIPTION PRODUCE VOUCHERS OFFERED TO PATIENTS IN NEED

PARTNERS

ACTIVE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS

COMMUNITY EXTENSION AGENCY

KATE B. REYNOLDS CHARITABLE TRUST

PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES

ROANOKE CHOWAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ROANOKE CHOWAN FOUNDATION

ROANOKE CHOWAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS