

On June 15, 2015, advocates for healthy food in the upper Manhattan region formally organized as Healthy Food for Upper Manhattan (HFUM). HFUM is a collaboration for communication between public health practitioners, health care providers, community stakeholders, and policy makers, which aims to raise awareness of the role of food policy in our communities and to build strategies to create healthier food environments in the Harlems and upper Manhattan. This meeting was hosted and organized by the NYC Food Policy Center at Hunter College in collaboration with Mt. Sinai Hospital, and Supportive Children’s Advocacy Network NY (SCAN NY).

Re-Cap of Last Meeting

During the inaugural meeting, our goal was to identify the issues concerning food in Upper Manhattan; for example, the need for food education and increased access to healthy food in NYC.  A “Living” Google Map was created to represent HFUM organizations and healthy foods available in local communities (such as farmer’s markets).

Currently our main goal is to convene a working group of Upper Manhattan food groups to develop shared long term goals for local food groups by:

1.     Finding common ground

2.     Maximizing cumulative impact

3.     Using resources more efficiently

4.     Creating culture of sharing and collective actions

5.     Avoiding duplication of effort, by helping bolster existing efforts.

Today’s Panel: Food & Crime

Today’s panel discussion was surrounding the topic of the relationship between youth, crime, and food. The panelist conversation was moderated by Bill Fink. The panelists included Estelle Stryker-Santiago from the New York District Attorney's Office, Judy De La Cruz, Fortune Society, Mac Levine from Concrete Safaris. Below are main points from the panel and announcements.

1. What does your organization do to try to discourage criminal activity, and what are your greatest challenges?

* Estelle Stryker-Santiago:
* The goal is to identify the people who are driving violent crime by dividing the city into 5 areas and assigning a prosecutor to each area
* Goal for future is to find initiatives and collaborations/programs to stop others from going into path of violence, or helping people coming out of state prison from going back into crime, for a more successful community reentry
* More successful project: Saturday Night Lights:
  + - * Using money seized from drug dealers and fraudulent bank activity, to open gyms on Friday and Saturday nights. The program has served more than 4,500 kids from the start.
      * Now focusing on taking a step back to let each community run their own gym while still providing the capital.
      * Another goal is to start focusing on healthy eating in addition to exercise

* Judy De La Cruz: Fortune Society, which helps anyone who has come in contact with the law
  + Fortune provides services starting by picking people up from Riker's island
  + Fortune aims to find a way to establish a step-by-step recovery plan for each person in order to meet each person's individual needs
  + Judy works with the Culinary Arts Training, consisting of a 6-week training to receive a food handlers license and an education on nutrition beyond restaurant work
* Mac Levine:
  + Starts gardening programs with children, focusing on spaces at Jefferson and Washington Housing that were previously dark spaces prone to crime
  + Kids involved in the gardening conduct community surveys to ask what people want to eat
  + Goal is to impact every third grader in the district, currently working with 14 schools and 5 community centers
  + Main concept is to attract eyes to teach people what is happening and welcome people to engage in whatever capacity they can; sometimes just watching the garden acts as "security"
  + Youth Garden Entrepreneurship Program where teenagers learn to build a business plan and how to sell produce to restaurants at reduced price

1. How do you utilize food techniques?
   * Judy De La Cruz:
     + Culinary training: take participants to farms, provide free food to take home, partner with organizations to employ graduated students
     + Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served every day at Fortune for participants
   * Mac Levine:
     + Make programs available at all times to reduce the number of hours that people can be alone walking through the development and causing trouble in the garden
     + Will post when food will be available for consumption and will give it to schools and parents. When parents learn that organic fresh food is available and that their kids grew it, they are so proud
     + Sometimes parents don’t know what to make with the provided vegetables, started to make a cookbook with parent submissions featuring a mix of cultures, reflective of the community

1. Parents are concerned that kids are eating unhealthy food and high-risk youth often take entry level jobs in fast food...what are alternatives to these jobs?
   * Judy De La Cruz:
     + Fast food restaurants are the ones to hire youth without experience and allow them to cook food without a food handler’s license. There are opportunities to work in youth-run farmers markets, as a bus boy or dishwasher
     + Ultimately, education is important to continue in order to be able to handle and prepare good and nutritious foods
   * Mac Levine:
     + There is a lack of people who come from the neighborhood in need who are also educated with an environmental health degree, and who can educate and relate best to the kids.
     + Education needs to start earlier for children, so they can pursue an environmental health degree and help their own neighborhood.
     + Outdoor industry: crisis that 70% of the educators are white. How can we reach population, that is not white, to play outside?
     + Medicinal Marijuana: Is now regulated by law and has previously gotten so many of the residents in trouble, the community should consider growing it for profit.

Question and Answers:

1. Diane Reed (NYCHA):
   1. People are scared to venture out in their own neighborhood even though they are paying taxes like everyone else and need access to food and recreational spaces. How do we go about making these changes? Youth think that they don’t have access to anything other than what they call home, resulting in territorial violence. Youth need education and a degree in something they truly like to do.

1. Diana Blackwell: Works with youth explorers, I dedicated a garden to the youth, is there advice on how to get start up funds to create an entrepreneurship-type of program for youth?
   1. Estelle Stryker- Santiago: There are funds available through RfP's focused on crime prevention. Consider if the program will be gardening or culinary
   2. Mac Levine: Explorers are welcome to come to my gardens and work with Concrete Safaris

1. Estelle Stryker-Santiago: If there is no public safety benefit for someone being in prison, there is an alternative to incarceration, Project Reset

Diana: funding opportunities/program updates and want to share them:

Tia: Food Bank for NYC: The Food Bank thinks beyond food, if a client needs food then they probably need other social services. The Food Bank has an online referral system where organizations can refer clients to other services (adult day care, free showers and haircuts, interview help, interview dress code etc.).The Food Bank has partnered with 400 other organizations.

Unidos Si Se Puede: The organization provides food and education as well as advice for those caring for family with mental illness. Education for parents is a priority in order to educate children. Unidos Si Se Puede hosts free Zumba classes and healthy cooking to help fight obesity in the area.