

Food Education and Environmental Development Aurora: Lessons Learned in Community Organizing through the Lens of a Food Intervention Program

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Abstract

Aurora, Colorado has been a long-standing target area for community organizing efforts due to its high proportion of low income, immigrant, and undocumented communities. The adult population faces disproportionately high rates of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity while the pediatric population faces high rates of childhood obesity and asthma compared to those living in more affluent cities of the Denver-metro area. For this reason, numerous community organizations are working to address the social determinants of health that are contributing to these poor health outcomes. Food Education and Environmental Development (FEED) Aurora is one such program. Created in 2016, the overarching goal of FEED Aurora is to improve eating attitudes and behaviors of food insecure or at-risk populations through a dual gardening and nutrition education program. Several iterations of the program have approached this goal in different ways with the most recent 2021 program year focusing on the entire family. Through education of adults around the importance of healthy eating, giving them the skills to increase the availability of fresh produce, and providing entire families with more nutritious meals, FEED aimed to affect the food environment and thus health of entire households. Despite evidence-based program design, sufficient funding, a diverse group of volunteers, and strong community partnerships, FEED 2021 only had one of five recruited families able to engage in the programming. This work reviews recent changes to the program, observations of FEED leaders, and survey data from community stakeholders to determine weaknesses in the current program schema and how to improve outreach to the community moving forward.