

Arvin Residents Engage in Creating a Healthier Community

by: Eva Falk

SUMMARY

Arvin residents have become the driving force towards building a healthier city for their fellow 13,000 neighbors. Coordinated outreach efforts from The Dolores Huerta Foundation have resulted in 112 Latino residents committed to raising awareness about the inequities that exist in being able to eat healthy and be physically active. Four schools, four playgrounds, and nearly 13,000 residents are on the verge of experiencing the impact that 112 Latino community members have been working on tirelessly to create a healthier Arvin - where walking and biking are safer, where schools and parks offer ample opportunity for safe physical activity, and where quality, healthy, and affordable food is commonplace.



CHALLENGE

The rural community of Arvin, in south Kern County, is made up of 95% Latinos, most who lack access to grocery stores offering healthy food within their neighborhoods. Arvin is considered a food desert and 70% of the population is living in poverty (at or below the 185 percent poverty level). More than 1 in 3 children in Kern County are overweight or obese. Contributing factors to these discouraging figures are the lack of limited options to purchase healthy

food and healthy beverages and safe places in Arvin for children and adults to exercise or play. Getting proper amounts of physical activity is challenging for Latinos in Arvin due to the lack of park space and access to safe places to be physically active. The neighborhoods lack proper lighting and maintenance for streets and sidewalks, creating safety concerns for walking and biking.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Cultiva La Salud is dedicated to engaging, informing and inspiring residents to actively advance personal, family and community health through healthy lifestyles and civic engagement. Cultiva La Salud is administered through the Public Health Institute. To learn more about Cultiva La Salud and ways you can become involved, visit: www.CultivaLaSalud.org. For more information about the Dolores Huerta Foundation, visit: www.DoloresHuerta.org.

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SOLUTION

As a result of 32 personal visits and 22 house meetings, DHF working in partnership with Cultiva La Salud, drew the attention of many community members who were motivated to work towards creating a healthier community. DHF hosted an Arvin General meeting where 112 residents collectively decided to form 4 committees that would be divided by 4 areas of focus. Chair and Co-Chairs were appointed and committee names were created: Estrellas Para Comidas Saludables, Simper Fresco, Comets Para Escuelas Abiertas and Unidad En Rueda. The goals of the committees are to develop, with city and school leaders, enhanced policy, system and environmental improvements that increase access to healthy foods/beverages and promote physical activity.

RESULTS

Latino residents in Arvin are motivated to create ways to improve their health, the health of their families, and the overall health of their community. Each committee meets bi-weekly to collaborate on ideas, delegate assignments, and seek opportunities for solutions to present to decision-makers. Committee Captains, Co-Captains, and members have participated in meetings with city and school leaders and continue to promote the voice of the community, the health struggles they faces, and their desire for healthier environments. They have successfully garnered the attention of decision-makers, who have responded with the willingness to listen and a continued effort to engage in dialogue around the input from community.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Arvin Latino residents are proving everyday that when a community takes ownership of the issues they face, support from decision-makers is inevitable, ensuring sustainable success. Committee members also continue to engage community to grow participation, build trust by word of mouth through their families, neighbors, and co-workers. Each committee has set goals, timelines, and direction. Establishing a self-sustaining co-op by the fall of 2018 is the focus for Estrellas Para Comidas Saludables. Siempre Fresco's sites are improving access to health and fresh produce in schools by revamping a school garden by 2016. Comets Para Escuelas Abiertas are committed to passing a joint-use policy at Arvin Middle School by 2016. Unidad En Ruedas efforts are focused on developing a safe bike lane to and around Arvin's largest park, Di Gorgio Park, by 2016.