

RIFPC Access Work Group
***Veggie Boxes + Clinica Esperanza +
Olneyville Housing Corporation =
more RI residents having ACCESS to
fresh, nutritious and affordable food.***

Clinica Esperanza, an Olneyville health care clinic offering primary care to uninsured adults, has a focus on preventive health maintenance and runs several programs that help patients make lifestyle changes to improve overall health. One of these programs is called Vida Sana, or “Healthy Life”. To help patients with metabolic syndrome (a combination of medical and health issues that, when occurring together, increase the risk of a person developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes), Vida Sana offers diet and nutrition education, cooking classes and exercise options for participants in a small, supportive setting. The Clinic wanted to incorporate increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables for the Vida Sana patients and was in preliminary conversations with Farm Fresh RI about possibly starting a Prescription Veggie Program or opening up a Farmers Market for their community. Both options lacked the extensive resources necessary to start them and talks were stalled.

Then, during an early summer 2012 meeting of the RI Food Policy Council’s Access Work Group, chaired by RIFPC member Amelia Rose of the Environmental Justice League, attendees helped to restart the conversation and lay the groundwork for delivery of *Veggie Boxes* - Farm Fresh RI’s weekly subscription of fresh produce directly delivered to workplaces and community centers - to Clinica Esperanza as part of the Vida Sana program. With funding help from the Olneyville Housing Corporation, Farm Fresh RI was able to offer subsidized Veggie Box subscriptions to Vida Sana patients starting in September 2012. Weekly boxes were delivered for patients through the end of October and then became biweekly boxes through mid-February.

“Delivering Veggie Boxes to Clinica Esperanza as part of its Vida Sana program was an easy thing to do and we are grateful that this connection was made”, says Kayla Ringelheim, Healthy Neighborhoods Coordinator at Farm Fresh and a member of the RI Food Policy Council. “The

more we can help connect education about managing diet-related diseases with access to affordable, healthy food, the better. Farm Fresh RI was happy to be a part of this partnership and we are glad that there were funding dollars available though Olneyville Housing Corp. to help make it possible.”

Those funding dollars were a part of the Community Action Team for a Healthier Olneyville (CAT), a coalition of stakeholder organizations working together to increase access to healthy food and physical activity in the neighborhood and decrease barriers for residents to live healthy lifestyles. Olneyville Housing Corporation is the convener of the CAT, whose members include Farm Fresh RI, Clinica Esperanza, and the EJ League. The group was formed as a result of a neighborhood health assessment - Action for a Healthier Olneyville - conducted by Olneyville Housing Corporation in partnership with the RI Department of Health and the Greater Providence YMCA. The assessment examined a broad range of factors that influence the health of Olneyville residents - including access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The CAT created a Community Action Plan from the results of the assessment and is overseeing its implementation. They were able to allocate implementation funds to pilot the veggie box program at the Clinic using a grant from RI Housing’s KeepSpace Initiative, which seeks to build strong, healthy, prosperous communities. Providing funds to help subsidize the cost of Veggie Boxes in the Vida Sana program was one of the ways OHC was able to implement some the Action Plan items that came about through the health assessment.

“We were excited to support the implementation of this pilot project as part of our Healthier Olneyville initiative, “ said Johanna Walczak, Community Building Program Manager at Olneyville Housing Corporation. “We heard about the Prescription Veggie program in Woonsocket and asked how we could replicate it in Olneyville. Farm Fresh RI and Clinica Esperanza were able to adapt a different program that would work better for our neighborhood, while meeting the same goal of increasing access to fresh vegetables.”

Farm Fresh RI will deliver Veggie Box subscriptions to the clinic again starting this

summer and running at least through the fall. Based on feedback from the patient community, there will be some additional resources inside the boxes, including dual-language recipes and preparation suggestions for the vegetables that come each week. Farm Fresh RI is also working to schedule cooking demonstrations for Veggie Box recipients and hopes to work with Clinica Esperanza staff to find other ways to actively engage patients with Veggie Box contents.

“Looking to the future, we are eager to organize more hands-on education about what is inside each Veggie Box delivery and help to provide more context about how to cook foods native to our New England region during different times of the year”, says Kayla Ringelheim. “In return, we are also looking forward to hearing back from Clinica Esperanza’s patients about how they like to prepare the Veggie Box foods themselves and how increased access to local, fresh vegetables from our nearby farms has had a positive influence on their health goals and outcomes.”

For Further Info:

RI Food Policy Council - www.rifoodcouncil.org

Farm Fresh RI - <http://www.farmfreshri.org/>

Olneyville Housing Corporation - www.olneyville.org

Clinica Esperanza - <http://www.aplacetobehealthy.org/>