



# Engaging Mobile Markets to Improve Access to Healthy Foods in the Urban Core

Weighing In, Children' Mercy | Truman Medical Center WIC | Kansas City, Mo | Presented By: Brenda Brewer, TMC-WIC Director, Shelly Summar, Weighing In Program Manager



## INTRODUCTION

- Jackson County is ranked 75 out of 115 Missouri counties for health outcomes. One of the biggest burdens in the county is the high rates of obesity and diabetes. Healthy food access is lower for the county (15.87 establishments /100,000) when compared to Missouri (18.23). The physical inactivity rate for the county is 24% and inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption is 80%.
- The targeted area for the project, the Linwood Corridor (within Jackson County), faces significant challenges, particularly in key drivers of health, like poverty and educational attainment. Rates of healthy behaviors are not at recommended levels for this area, county or state. The Linwood Corridor is considered a "food desert." The rate of stores that accept SNAP is high, double state and county rates. However, the rate of WIC authorized stores is considerably lower than state rates.
- Within the Linwood Corridor are many active community partners, including a vibrant YMCA that serves as a community hub. Some unique resources are an active library branch with wellness programming; a new full-service mobile market, and a fruit and vegetable mobile market that service the area. WIC is co-located at a health clinic, Hope Family Care Center, in the heart of the targeted area.
- The project seeks to expand access to healthy foods through placement and promotion strategies with mobile markets and grocery stores. We aim to increase the number of WIC authorized stores to expand access and fill an important gap. Through our coalition, we are working to align multiple agencies' efforts to change policies and practices to support healthy behaviors, and we are building on our past work to improve community clinical linkages through our Healthy Lifestyles Initiative framework.



The Linwood Family YMCA ribbon cutting Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> was well-attended by community members and civic leaders. The Linwood YMCA, with its new renovation, houses a teaching kitchen, indoor/outdoor pool and will be able to provide expanded programming for the targeted area. Future plans include an on-site health clinic.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

### More stores promote healthy foods

We are partnering with two mobile markets to improve access to healthy foods in the community. The Truman Medical Center (TMC) Healthy Harvest mobile market provides low-cost, high quality fruits and vegetables to underserved communities. Rollin Grocer is a new full service mobile market that brings a variety of groceries, including fruits and vegetables, to the urban core. Our project seeks to increase awareness of the mobile markets and to support the promotion of healthy foods through collaboration with the Healthy Lifestyles Initiative and 12345 Fit-Tastic! messaging campaign.

### More stores or markets accept WIC

We are working with the state WIC department to establish a pilot for Rollin Grocer, a full service mobile grocery store, to become a WIC authorized vendor. This would improve access to healthy foods for WIC participants in our targeted area, where very few stores accept WIC.

### Prescriptions for fruits and vegetables

We are working to connect families with "prescriptions" for fruits and vegetables through a partnership with the TMC Mobile Market. With support from another funding source, we hope to test providing the "prescription" with a \$5 coupon for fruits and vegetables that can be redeemed at the TMC Mobile Market. We hope to glean lessons learned about the importance of the voucher for redemption so as to inform future efforts.

## ACTIVITIES

Some of our key activities in completing our project strategies are the following:

- Organized grocer meeting to gauge interest and hear from grocers what strategies were of interest
- Compiled and submitted a proposal to the state for a pilot project, authorizing Rollin Grocer mobile market to accept WIC
- Aligned with existing efforts and interest at Truman Medical Center, Children's Mercy Hospital and TMC-WIC for fruit and vegetable prescription implementation
- Worked with the mobile markets to create promotional and educational materials that leverage existing efforts to promote a consistent community message- 12345 Fit-Tastic!- used by coalition partners in the healthcare, WIC and YMCA settings
- Initiated co-location of WIC within Children's Mercy Hospital (CMH) primary care clinic and organized trainings for CMH healthcare providers on WIC services and referral



TMC Healthy Harvest Mobile Market delivers low-cost, high-quality fruits and vegetables to underserved communities.

## OUTCOMES

Some anticipated outcomes for the project are the following:

- One new stops added to the TMC Healthy Harvest Mobile Market within the targeted zip codes
- 200 families receive vouchers along with fruit and vegetable "prescriptions" redeemable at the TMC Mobile Market
- 1 new WIC authorized store, Rollin Grocer, operates as a pilot for WIC in mobile markets
- 1 new WIC clinic, co-located at Children's Mercy Primary Care clinics (more than 17,000 well-child checks annually)
- 30 primary care providers trained in WIC services and referral
- 5 new coalition members engaged in promoting the project and healthy behaviors building on the community messaging campaign -12345 Fit-Tastic!



Fresh produce is available at Rollin Grocer, a full-service mobile grocery store serving food deserts and underserved neighborhoods in Kansas City. Rollin Grocer operates 6 days/week, year-round.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Our biggest lesson learned is the importance of adapting our strategies to achieve our intended outcomes. Based on the realities in the community and feedback from community members and the leadership team, we have had to rethink certain strategies or look for other partnerships that can help us achieve our goals.
- Some of our biggest challenges have been staff turnover of our key partners. We had great momentum initially, partnering with a small healthcare clinic in the heart of our target area. However, the director and physician champion left the clinic. We experienced a similar challenge when a very engaged grocer partner, who had begun offering fruits and vegetables for the first time, recently closed. We have since identified opportunities within the larger healthcare systems of Children's Mercy and TMC. We are modifying our activities and approaches to take advantage of opportunities and align with existing efforts.
- Another key lesson has been the importance of our community partnerships. Our leadership team members have helped us to make connections with community members and build new relationships with key community partners.

## BEST PRACTICES

**Aligning across sectors and with existing initiatives-** We have been able to take advantage of opportunities within the YMCA, Children's Mercy, TMC and with other community partners by being open to aligning our efforts with existing initiatives.

**Employing a consistent message about health-** Our coalition works to promote a consistent message about health- 12345 Fit-Tastic! When partners from across the community share this consistent message in different settings, families are better able to recognize and remember key healthy habits.



## NEXT STEPS

We hope to build on efforts in this project after completion in the following areas:

- Compile results of fruit and vegetable prescription pilot and make recommendations for healthcare providers and other community partners.
- Partner coalition members to pursue WIC approval for Rollin Grocer in Kansas as well as Missouri, expanding access for the entire Kansas City metro region.
- Engage new TMC healthcare clinic, co-located at renovated Linwood Family YMCA, in 12345 Fit-Tastic! messaging and healthy Lifestyles assessments and plans to improve health behaviors.
- Continue training for new and existing coalition partners on WIC services and chronic disease prevention strategies through the Healthy Lifestyles Initiative.