



BUILDING TOGETHER

Developing key partnerships to support youth-led participatory action research in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming

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Nicolet Middle School youth leaders Mia Mendoza, Katelynn Rosado, Bryn Thornton, and Samantha Whildin-Walls.

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HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report documents the work of six CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California county programs who facilitated a youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) project as part of the Youth Engagement Initiative during Federal Fiscal Year 2018. YPAR is a process that engages young people in using the tools of research to critically assess conditions that shape their lives, with the goal of supporting action to improve those conditions. This report highlights diverse examples of YPAR in action within SNAP-Education programs, with a focus on the critical role of partnerships in authentically engaging young people in policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change to promote nutrition, wellness, food access and physical activity. In California, the name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Education) is CalFresh Healthy Living. After a brief introduction and executive summary, this report explores the key theme of partnerships within CalFresh Healthy Living, UC YPAR projects and examines the many lessons learned from these case studies during FFY 2018, concluding with profiles of each of the six projects.

Since no two YPAR projects are the same, the information presented is intended as a reference rather than a step-by-step manual. These case studies and their promising practices offer examples of what is possible as youth and program facilitators craft youth-led PSE change efforts that fit the specific needs and circumstances of their unique communities.

THE DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Information provided here was collected through monthly check-in calls and additional technical assistance conversations with individual counties; statewide youth engagement conference calls that occurred every other month and involved all CalFresh Healthy Living, UC counties engaged in this work; site visits and in-person meetings; end-of-year exit interviews with adult allies; youth-produced final reports, videos, and presentations; CalFresh Healthy Living, UC retrospective YPAR student surveys; archived items and program documents from counties; and extensive field notes.

THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Launched in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2016, CalFresh Healthy Living, UC's Youth Engagement Initiative is exploring innovative strategies to engage youth in nutrition and physical activity. Projects within this initiative seek to empower young people from vulnerable communities to lead efforts that improve the environments where they live, play, eat, shop, and learn.

The Youth Engagement Initiative embraces core youth development principles, as well as USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP-Education) Guidance that employ policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change activities—such as multi-level interventions and community and public health approaches—in addition to providing direct nutrition education.¹ CalFresh Healthy Living, UC recognized that youth who would be impacted by those PSE decisions should be involved in identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating the change interventions themselves. The goal of this initiative is to build the capacity of youth to contribute to PSE changes that help make the healthy choice the easy and preferred choice, while developing their leadership abilities, sense of self-efficacy, civic engagement, and college and career readiness. Throughout this process, UCCE staff serve as adult allies, a term used in the field and within this report to acknowledge their role as intergenerational collaborators committed to supporting and facilitating youth-centered efforts. For a full definition of policy, systems and environmental changes, please see the Fiscal Year 2018 SNAP-Education Plan Guidance, pp. 34-35.

In FFY 2017, three CalFresh Healthy Living, UC county programs pursued YPAR projects and received collective training and individual coaching from a technical assistance team. The efforts and lessons learned from this initial programmatic year were captured in [last year's report](#), “Moving from Serving Youth to Engaging Youth: Youth-led Policy, Systems and Environmental Change Interventions in UC CalFresh Nutrition Education².” This year in FFY 2018, the number of participating CalFresh Healthy Living, UC county projects increased to six and the technical assistance team instituted a cohort model to promote collective learning and cross-program collaboration and mentorship. The YPAR cohorts were comprised of nutrition educators and supervisors implementing a YPAR project with a similar timeline. At strategic points in the process these groups came together for collective training, technical assistance and program development.

In FFY 2019, the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Youth Engagement Initiative aims to build upon its significant programmatic successes from the past two years. An expanded cohort model for training and technical assistance will support counties across the state and will strengthen the collaboration between the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Program, the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR), UC 4-H, the California Department of Public Health, Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition, and the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. Four different cohorts tailored to practitioners with various levels of experience will support the full spectrum of SNAP-Ed youth engagement strategies, encouraging collective learning and mentorship. Regular, individualized coaching will remain a critical component of the technical assistance provided to practitioners to build on the lessons learned during collective training sessions and troubleshoot issues as they emerge. The goal for the 2018-2019 school year is to continue shifting toward engaging youth in nutrition and physical activity in more communities and build partnerships in communities across the state.

YOUTH-LED PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (YPAR)

YPAR promotes process-oriented, reflexive research and action driven by youth's perspectives and strengths, allowing young people to study and address social issues that impact them in ways that build their capacities as civic actors.³ It is recognized by SNAP-Ed as a practice-tested PSE strategy that “aims to empower youth and achieve environmental changes related to health and nutrition” by having young people “identify their own issues, problems, and possible solutions.”⁴ YPAR projects “provide youth with the opportunity to engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, service learning, and strategizing skills to address and promote nutrition and/or physical activity issues. It is part of an overall goal to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, and physical activity.”⁵

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents six YPAR case studies from the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Youth Engagement Initiative in FFY 2018, examining their approaches and lessons learned with respect to the role of forging and sustaining partnerships. UCCE staff primarily work with school administrators, staff and teachers during and after school, maintaining collaborations as intermediaries who inform partners and connect them to the project and young people. Engaging partners increases access to youth participants and resources, ensures information and experiences are shared, and increases young people's social competencies, community engagement and intergenerational relationship building. Collaboration also requires significant and variable time allocations and can involve conflicting partner interests and objectives, requiring adult allies to actively advocate for a youth-centered process.

Key lessons learned about developing and maintaining partnerships:

1. Active school administration support is critical. School leaders should be engaged from the beginning and provided tangible ways to contribute to a project.
2. Everyone involved must have a clear understanding of the YPAR process before a project is initiated, including partners, youth participants, adult allies and their supervisors.
3. Maintaining a consistent presence on campus helps to establish long standing, deliberate relationships and demonstrate dedication to the project, school and community.
4. Partnerships require flexibility because varying amounts of staff time may be needed at different phases of a YPAR project and school year.
5. Adult allies should play a leading role in identifying key stakeholders in support of the project and making connections as early as possible between adult partners, youth and the project.
6. Open communication and clear guidelines are critical to support a youth-centered process, build authentic relationships and foster trust.
7. It is important to have transparent discussions and set expectations as early as possible regarding any significant project parameters that might impact roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, or the project's timeline, objectives or issue areas.
8. Developing young people's capacity and maintaining a youth-centered process takes continuous reflection and adaptability, as well as dedicated time and effort.
9. Providing gentle guidance as an adult ally means knowing when to intervene and when to create space for youth to lead.
10. Team building and having fun are important elements of youth engagement work that should be included at every stage of a YPAR project.
11. There appear to be benefits to having multiple YPAR projects and adult allies working simultaneously in close geographic proximity to one another.
12. There will always be challenges but it is important to keep moving forward, maintain momentum, innovate and adapt, remaining committed as an adult ally to the youth and a youth-centered process.

DEFINITION OF PARTNERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are a critical element of YPAR projects through the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Youth Engagement Initiative. UCCE staff often form partnerships with teachers, school administrators, community members, local businesses and organizations. In their role serving as adult allies with youth-led PSE change initiatives, UCCE staff primarily work with schools in afterschool programs and during the school day. These partnerships are intended to support the young people and help build their capacities to create change in their communities and give them the skills to shape policies and programs that impact them. Engaging partners increases access to youth participants and resources, ensures information and experiences are shared, and increases young people's social competencies, community engagement and intergenerational relationship building. Partnerships are typically maintained by adult allies who often play an intermediary role, informing partners and connecting them to the project and young people.

Collaboration also comes with challenges. As projects progress and numbers of partnerships expand, adult allies must coordinate communication and foster relationship building between themselves, young people, and partners. This requires flexibility that is often constrained by other work obligations. Sometimes partners have conflicting interests and objectives. Lastly, because the YPAR process is youth-driven, adult allies need to actively remind partners that the young people themselves are part of decision-making.

This section expands on these topics and focuses on lessons learned related to partnerships, challenges, and how adult allies navigated them to ensure projects remained youth-centered.

LESSONS LEARNED

Active school administration support for the project is critical

Get administrators engaged at a high level from the beginning. Be as clear as possible about specific needs and a commitment to assist, giving administrators a tangible way to support and contribute to the project.

- Examples of support: coordinating with teachers and staff; promoting the group to others on campus; providing meeting space, access to WiFi and technology.
- Engaging administrators early on in the planning process helps build collective buy-in for prospective projects and establish parameters for administrators' involvement—preserving autonomy for youth input and leadership.
- Success stories can be really helpful to build relationships with new staff, develop new champions, and demonstrate how YPAR efforts can help promote and improve schools. UCCE staff shared UC Delivers articles, final products from previous projects (videos, photos, presentation slide decks, final reports), and other program documentation pieces.
- Adult allies generated on-campus support through champion teachers, who provided consistent updates and highlighted the group's progress to broker support with administrators and build interest in the project.

Cultivate a clear understanding of the YPAR process

YPAR is unique in that it is youth-centered, iterative, and process-oriented, requiring flexibility and a commitment of time and support that can differ significantly from more familiar programming (e.g. direct education).

- All partners involved in the project must have a clear understanding of the YPAR process before it is initiated—including youth participants, school administrators and partners, as well as the adult allies facilitating the project and their supervisors.

Maintain a consistent presence on campus

Establishing long-standing and deliberate relationships with school partners requires being physically present on campus as much as possible. Demonstrating dedication to the project, school and community helps to foster the same level of commitment in youth and adult partners.

- Regular visits to campus also provide additional opportunities to connect with youth participants outside of meetings.
- For one UCCE staff member, partnership development and maintenance was particularly smooth because of the longstanding relationships and trust they built at the school. The staff member had grown up in the community, attended the school and worked with some of the youth for a couple years as a volunteer with the afterschool program before initiating a YPAR project.

Partnerships take time and flexibility

While the percentage of work time varied across programs, staff need to be flexible with time to develop and maintain partnerships at different phases of a YPAR project and school year.

- This was a persistent struggle for staff who are constrained to a specific percentage of work time dedicated to their YPAR project.

Be an active player in facilitating connections between partners, youth, and the project

Adult allies should play a leading role in identifying partners in support of the project. This requires understanding the surrounding community and researching potential resources (e.g. unique partner attributes that may provide creative opportunities for assistance and collaboration).

- One adult ally worked with a local company to identify an affordable water testing kit and establish standard field practices for the group's research, which would have been difficult to accomplish on their own.

Be transparent with young people

Establish open communication and set clear guidelines with young people as early as possible (e.g. recruitment) to support a youth-centered process, build authentic relationships and foster trust. This can include establishing collective roles, responsibilities, expectations and decision-making processes for youth and adults; discussing any parameters related to potential issue areas or research topics the group can focus on.

- Develop the project's timeline, structure and objectives with youth, being realistic about what can be completed given the anticipated time frame and competing priorities.
- UCCE staff revisited their group's project timeline towards the end of the year so youth understood how many meetings remained in relation to how much they still wanted to accomplish. This reinvigorated participants at a crucial stage and continued to encourage their ownership over the project.
- Another adult ally intentionally built youth's capacity to engage directly with their YPAR training materials so everyone shared in the planning process and decision making.

Check in regularly with youth participants and change course when necessary

Developing young people's capacity and maintaining a youth-centered process takes continuous reflection and adaptability, as well as dedicated time and effort. Providing gentle guidance as an adult ally means knowing when to intervene and when to create space for youth to lead.

- Outside of meetings, different youth may respond more effectively to different communication methods (e.g. phone call, text, group chat, social media site), so utilizing a variety of approaches can be helpful.
- When UCCE staff noticed that youth engagement was low, they initiated a vote to determine if young people wanted to move forward with the current project. When youth were given the opportunity to opt in or out of a YPAR effort and choose the topic, their attitudes, engagement and ownership over the process improved significantly.
- One project created Action Teams that functioned similar to subcommittees. Students were split into smaller working groups with clearly defined focus areas and tasks so youth could opt-in to specific roles, pursue their interests, leverage their strengths, and exercise leadership over a segment of a larger project.

Find different and innovative ways to keep youth engaged throughout the course of the project and keep it fun

Team building is an important element of youth engagement work that should be included at every stage of a YPAR project. Do not short change having fun—build in time for this!

- Make sure to do fun activities every time you are together to keep meetings engaging. One adult ally set aside a portion of time at the end of each meeting to go outside and simply play together as a group, supporting youth retention and relationship building while also promoting physical activity.
- Preparing and enjoying a healthy snack is another way to build relationships and is a retention tool. One UCCE staff member partnered with the culinary class teacher to get donated food items, while another utilized an outside grant to purchase snacks for meetings.
- Whenever possible, seek creative ways to compensate youth for their efforts and involvement. One project provided youth with paid compensation through a collaboration with the UC 4-H Youth Development Program.
- The setting and environment for meetings is very important—choose a location where youth feel comfortable. One group met outside in their garden, where youth felt at home and could have a break from being in a classroom setting.
- Be sure to celebrate successes throughout the project and at the end of the year. Even if a full YPAR project is not completed, ensure participants finish the year with a sense of closure and accomplishment. One project celebrated their work at the end of the school year with a recognition dinner for youth group members and their families, while two other projects created culminating videos to highlight their research and accomplishments and inspire other youth to join the continuing effort the following year.

Build partnerships between YPAR projects

There appear to be benefits to multiple YPAR projects and adult allies working simultaneously in close geographic proximity to one another.

- An awareness of and connection with other YPAR efforts can help motivate youth and encourage greater engagement, wider perspectives and deeper understanding of possibilities through the exchange of ideas. Nearby youth can also support each other's action strategies and build greater collective power.
- In one county, UCCE staff worked closely together and were able to support, motivate and inspire each other. Having a second adult ally on hand to substitute or assist during meetings was very helpful for group management and progress.

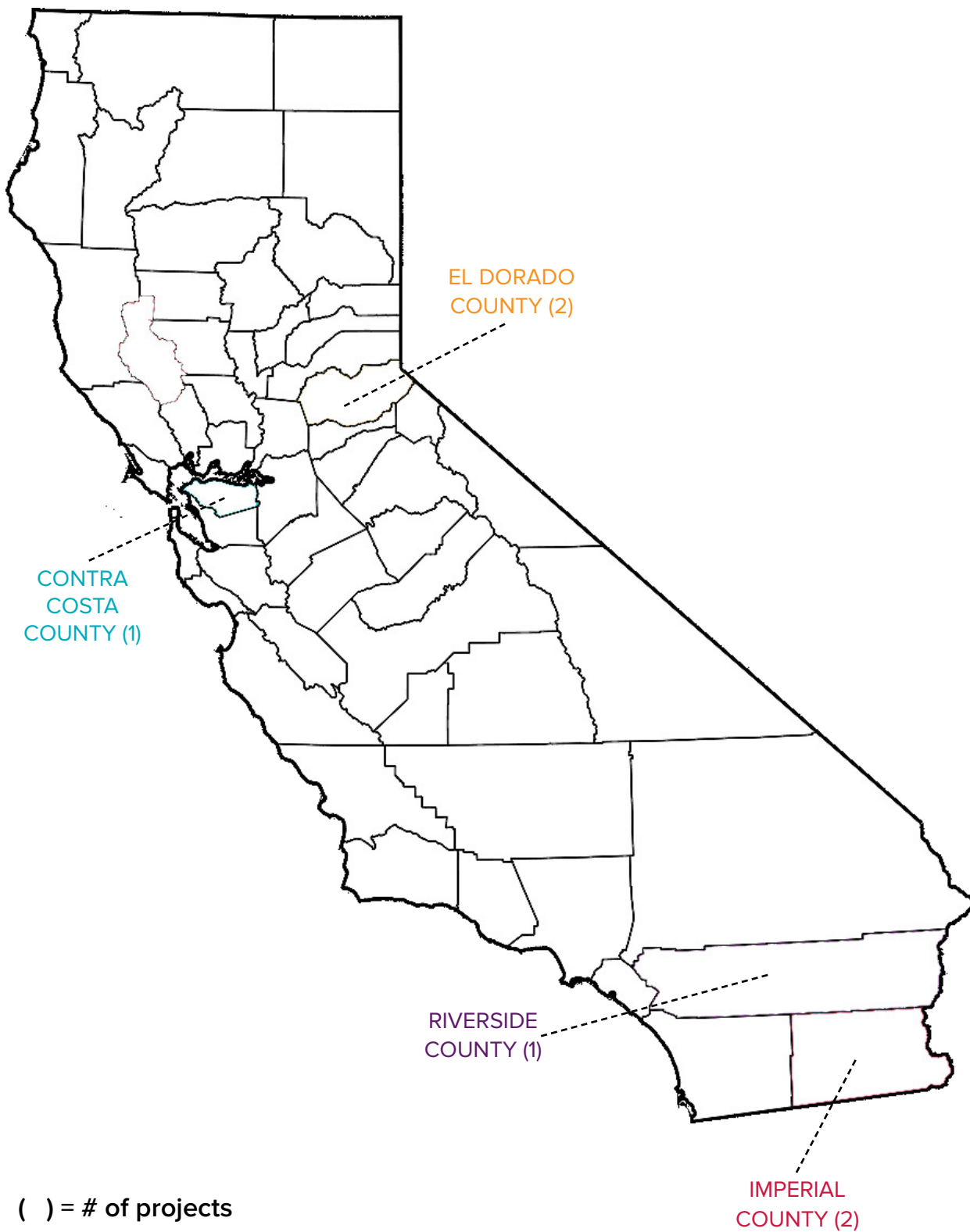
Keep moving forward, innovate and adapt

There are always going to be challenges but it is important to maintain momentum and approach adult allyship as an active state to continually strive towards rather than a static, self-conferred title.

- All of this year's YPAR projects faced a number of hurdles—such as shifting timelines, conflicts with partners, competing priorities, and fluctuations in youth engagement—but were successful because of the adult allies' perseverance and commitment to the youth and a youth-centered process.

What follows are profiles of the six CalFresh Healthy Living, UC YPAR projects for FFY 2018, providing a deeper examination of lessons learned and the critical role of partnerships in authentically engaging youth in PSE change interventions.

YPAR PROJECT LOCATIONS (2017-2018)



Project	Contra Costa: Crockett	El Dorado: Georgetown	El Dorado: South Lake Tahoe
Setting & Duration	After School, 9 months	In-School, 9 months	In-School, 5 months
Key Partners*	School; School District; Parents; UC 4-H; Bayer; EBMUD	School; 6th Grade Class	School; AVID Program
Youth Leaders	6 high school students	25 elementary school students	4 high school students
Issue	Water Access, Appeal & Safety On & Off Campus	School Garden	District Health & Wellness Center
Research Methods	Schoolwide Survey; Water Quality Testing	PhotoVoice; Survey	PhotoVoice; Survey
Final Product & Recommendations	Presented findings to School Board via PowerPoint presentation	Presented research findings and proposed designs for new school garden site to principal, peers, parents, and community partners via video & PhotoVoice exhibit	Developing recommendations from survey results

Project	Imperial: Calexico	Riverside: Banning	Imperial: Meadows Union
Setting & Duration	After School, 5 months	In-School, 8 months	After School, 9 months
Key Partners*	School; ASSETs Program	School; ASB Class	School; ASES Program
Youth Leaders	4 high school students	4 middle school students	14 K-8 students
Issue	Food Access & Nutrition at School	Lunchroom Environment & Physical Activity at School	Cafeteria Food Waste
Research Methods	Video Interviews	Focus Groups	Plate Waste Study; Observation
Final Product & Recommendations	Advocating for youth involvement in Local School Wellness Policy Committee via video & PowerPoint presentation	Provided input on the cafeteria redesign & developed focus group protocol to research the school community's reaction to a walking trail on campus	Presented to superintendent & principal via PowerPoint presentation with video; recommended smaller portions, installing a share table & fridge

*East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), After School Education and Safety (ASES), After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs), Associated Student Body (ASB)



CONTRA COSTA

John Swett High School's 4-H2O YPAR Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

UCCE Contra Costa County staff facilitated their first YPAR project at John Swett High School. This cross-disciplinary project began in September 2016 led by Marisa Neelon—Nutrition, Family & Consumer Sciences Advisor—and Charles Go—UC 4-H Youth Development Advisor—and was brought on as a project with CalFresh Healthy Living, UC in December 2017. Eli Figueroa, Project 4-H2O Coordinator, started in December 2017 and served as the main adult ally and facilitator at 0.5 FTE. A group of six high school students met weekly for 60-90 minutes after school. The project focused on access to and the appeal of clean and safe drinking water for students.

SETTING

- The school is located in Crockett, a small town northeast of San Francisco. The town is situated next to the California and Hawaiian Sugar Company (C&H) and was originally built to house their employees.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 558 students, with 29% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 19% non-Hispanic White, 17% Black or African American, 14% Asian, 10% Filipino; 11% English Language Learners (primarily Spanish and Punjabi-speakers), 55% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Project 4-H2O was designed as an after school initiative in partnership with John Swett High School that incorporated YPAR into the UC 4-H model: once students were selected for the YPAR project, they were registered for the UCANR Contra Costa 4-H Youth Development Program.
- Cross-disciplinary effort linking nutrition and UC 4-H programming through UCANR with CalFresh Healthy Living, UC and their Youth Engagement Initiative; additional partnerships were developed with the National 4-H Council, Bayer and the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD). Eli worked half time coordinating the YPAR project through funding provided by CalFresh Healthy Living, UC.
- Multiple collaborations generated strong program incentives: compensation for youth participants; travel to the 4-H National Youth Summit on Agri-Science in Chevy Chase, Maryland, which helped develop trust and relationships within the group; support and guidance from two Bayer employees serving as expert consultants to the project.
- Eli's relationship with the librarian gave them access to a meeting space and computers. Communicated with the principal to provide project updates and gain administrative approval for the group's research.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- School principal and counselor helped recruit youth, who completed an online application, submitted a resume, and were then interviewed by the coordinator. Selection criteria included sophomore, junior or senior-year status; a minimum GPA of 2.5; and the abilities to work as a team member and follow through with project commitments.
- Four students started with the project as juniors during the 2016-2017 school year and continued this year. Eli recruited two additional students in February 2018, providing them with boost trainings to get them up to speed with the other members.
- Eli also hosted a parent meet-and-greet to introduce himself as the group's new adult ally and build relationships with youth participants' parents.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Adult allies determined the project goals and objectives to ensure that it reflected SNAP-Ed parameters; however, the youth defined the issue area they wanted to research within the broader objectives. After having secured approval for six new water stations the previous school year, youth decided to focus on water quality and safety in addition to access.

Research Question: Do John Swett High School students have access to safe and appealing drinking water at school and in their community?

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Survey from previous school year helped the group analyze student beverage consumption and identify popular drinking water access locations at the high school.
- This year's survey collected follow-up data on water consumption and identified popular drinking water access locations for students beyond their school campus in the community of Crockett. Survey results identified three access sites.

- Project consultants from Bayer were not allowed to analyze external samples at their lab but offered advice and support for the water testing process—recommended an affordable water testing kit available online, which was purchased with UC 4-H funds.
- Eli ensured youth were able to put science into action and test the water themselves, giving them hands-on experience collecting water samples and data for their project at the three identified community access locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINAL PRODUCTS

- Created a presentation about their project and presented their findings to the School Board in August. Sought continued support for the installation of the six water stations, peer education to promote student water consumption, and enactment of a board policy to ensure every student has access to free, safe and appealing drinking water at school all day.
- The [Putting Youth on the Map online data mapping tool](#) enhanced students' advocacy efforts for school and community change and inspired them to create their own map identifying sites where their peers accessed water in the community.

ACTION & OUTCOMES

- Students tabled at Crockett's annual Sugartown Festival and provided free water through EBMUD's Water On Wheels trailer. Gave them the opportunity to share their project with community members while providing the public access to 500 gallons of drinking water.

"[I learned] how to approach something scientifically. You have to find out the causes and it's not just one cause usually. There are multiple solutions and how to figure out what is the best solution for everyone."

—Project 4-H2O Youth Leader

- Challenging logistics on the district's end led to a delay in the installation of the six water stations at the high school; but construction plans to remodel and modernize the high school include installation of the water stations.
- Youth designed a project logo and slogan to use in promotional efforts and advocacy.

NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- Plan to recruit additional students for the 2018-2019 school year as four of the six youth have graduated. Initial recruitment strategy includes outreach during the high school's Back to School Night in September.
- Youth will continue conducting peer education around the health benefits of drinking water and promote the use of the water stations as they are installed. Following the Teens-as-Teachers model, Project 4-H2O aims to have high school students train middle school students on water issues to create a pipeline to the YPAR project when they eventually transition to high school.
- Pending the installation of the new water stations they successfully advocated for last year, Project 4-H2O youth plan to distribute a post-survey in spring 2019 to assess how the water stations have influenced students' water consumption while at school and if they are making healthier beverage choices overall.

“The first thing we did was gather data through a survey on students drinking habits and we took all that data and found that students weren’t drinking that much water. And one of the reasons was because the water coming out of the water fountains they thought tasted bad and wasn’t of good quality so we brought that up to the school board. And they were like ‘Oh, we didn’t know that.’ We offered a solution. We could get a hydration station and also test the water beforehand so students would know it’s safe to drink.”

—Project 4-H2O Youth Leader





EL DORADO

Georgetown Elementary School's YPAR Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

El Dorado County UCCE staff facilitated their second consecutive YPAR project at Georgetown Elementary School. Miranda Capriotti, Nutrition Educator, helped to facilitate the first YPAR project at the school and was joined this year by a second Nutrition Educator, Carmela Padilla, to serve as the project's main adult allies. The group met once a week for one hour in Mrs. Brown's sixth grade classroom and focused on a new school garden site.

SETTING

- The school is located in Black Oak Mine Unified School District. This district serves a rural region known as the Georgetown Divide, which is situated along the border of El Dorado and Placer Counties. The small town is geographically isolated from the rest of the county and is a tight-knit community.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 231 students, with 86% identifying as non-Hispanic White, 9% Hispanic/Latino; 63% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Initiative was structured as an in-school YPAR project in partnership with Mrs. Brown's sixth grade class; youth met with Miranda and Carmela once a week during her class time.
- Mrs. Brown continued to be a strong supporter of this project. She often served as the liaison between Miranda, Carmela, and the school's principal. Provided in-class support for the project when the students needed additional work time outside of scheduled meetings.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- The project involved 25 students in Mrs. Brown's 6th grade class.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- At the beginning of the school year, Miranda and Carmela planned to work with the new students to continue the previous year's project focused on purchasing a healthy vending machine for the school. However, the principal was interested in relocating the school's garden and introduced this new focus to the students.
- Their effort initially struggled with lack of youth engagement and ownership as well as behavior management issues, all connected to their competing youth engagement projects that were more adult-driven than youth-led. So, Miranda and Mrs. Brown facilitated an anonymous vote amongst the students to decide which project

they wanted to work on—25 students voted to move forward with the new school garden project and 4 chose to participate in another activity.

- Miranda and Carmela worked hard to ensure the new school garden project remained youth-driven and youth-led. “Action teams” had clearly defined focus areas and responsibilities: 1) Presentation, 2) Advertising, 3) Ambassadors, 4) Gallery, and 5) Garden Design Team. Along with deciding to switch their focus issue, implementing defined roles dramatically improved youth participation, ownership and engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Students interviewed a UCCE master gardener and the UCCE Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor to learn more about school gardens and the garden planning process—helped set expectations for what could be accomplished by the end of the school year.
- Through PhotoVoice, highlighted old garden site challenges (e.g. located too far away from classrooms across a large, potentially dangerous parking lot; not fully utilized; shaded for a good portion of the day).
- Distributed a survey to peers to learn how a new school garden site could be better utilized by students and teachers. Results showed students wanted colorful flowers and edible plants, a place to have lunch, and potentially a café that could serve food from the garden.

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINAL PRODUCTS

- At the end of the school year, students hosted a garden gallery walk during Open House: displayed survey results and data maps highlighting physical fitness levels and student health risks in the school district, proposed designs for the new school garden site, and shared photos with written narratives from their PhotoVoice project. Open House was attended by members of the school community, parents, and community partners.
- Also created a video documenting their work throughout the school year.

ACTION & OUTCOMES

- Miranda and Carmela worked with the principal to secure a \$2,000 grant from the Whole Foods Whole Kids Foundation to support the school garden. Next year, they will work with a new group of students to decide how to spend the money.
- Georgetown Elementary received funding to be part of the New Tech Network—a project-based learning program that has a student-centered culture and overlaps with tech, student engagement and community service. The principal reached out to Miranda and Carmela to meet with the New Tech Network staff with plans to integrate and institutionalize their youth engagement work.
- The students were proud of their work and felt they did something important that was not just for themselves but for their younger siblings and community.

“I think the garden project will help improve our school’s health because it helps our school have healthy food option that are good for us and if we eat our fruits and vegetables we will grow up strong and healthy.”
—Georgetown Youth Leader

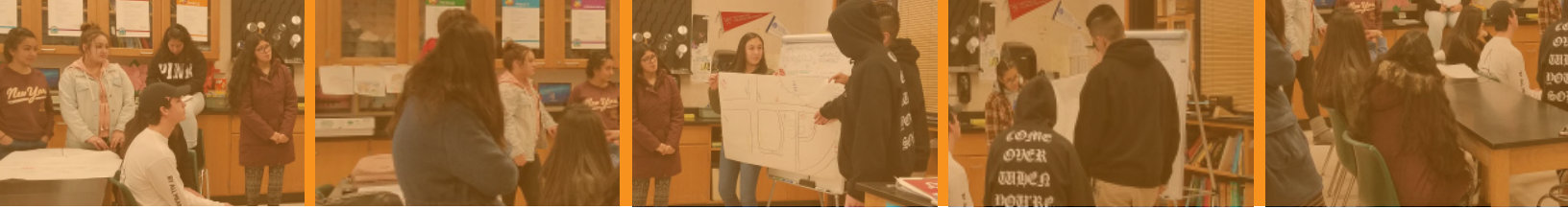
NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- The youth were concerned that the next 6th grade class would not be interested in continuing with their school garden project, just as they had pivoted away from their predecessors' healthy vending machine effort. They presented their project video to incoming 6th grade students to inspire them to continue with the project in the 2018-2019 school year.
- Every school year, Miranda and Carmela have to work with a new youth cohort because their group members all transition to middle school. They want to assist with orienting youth to YPAR by creating a project pipeline, providing nutrition and physical activity direct education to 5th grade classes so students come into 6th grade with a baseline knowledge ready to jump right into the YPAR project. Plan to prioritize and align new students' interests at the beginning of the year as well.



“I think the garden project will help our school be more healthy because it brings better healthy food to our school and gives us the opportunity to work really hard on something that is fun.”

—Georgetown Youth Leader



EL DORADO

South Tahoe High School's AVID YPAR Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

El Dorado County UCCE staff facilitated their first YPAR project at South Tahoe High School in collaboration with the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) class, a college preparatory program for first generation college-going students. Guadalupe Ramirez and Cristina Luquin, both CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Nutrition Educators, served as the main adult allies and facilitators. The group met once a week for 80 minutes in-class on campus.

During the first year, Guadalupe and Cristina focused on establishing partnerships with key school leaders and staff members on campus and building a presence among the youth with whom they intend to work. Facilitating a YPAR project for the first time proved to have its own unique challenges and opportunities which helped to form the foundation for future youth engagement work in South Lake Tahoe.

SETTING

- The project took place at South Tahoe High School, the only high school in the Lake Tahoe Unified School District that serves the surrounding unincorporated communities. The school is located in a small resort city in the Sierra Nevada Mountains that borders the California-Nevada state line. Tahoe has high, year-round tourism with a corresponding large service economy to accommodate the tourist demand for hotels, restaurants, etc.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 1,029 students, with 51% identifying as non-Hispanic White, 38% Hispanic/Latino; 13% were Spanish-speaking English Language Learners, 54% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Guadalupe and Cristina had not previously worked at the school; they identified an existing group of students on campus, the AVID class, and initially came as guest speakers before the project started.
- Ms. Zalles, the AVID teacher, served as a critical link between Guadalupe, Cristina, and the school administrators. To build interest on campus, she presented project updates during staff meetings and gave students extra credit as an incentive for participating.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- Guadalupe and Cristina utilized PhotoVoice simultaneously as a recruitment and a community assessment tool to engage students and build interest in the project. They launched the project during the second half of the school year by facilitating PhotoVoice exercises with the students before their scheduled visits to college campuses.

- The project began with all 14 AVID students and took place during class time.
- A couple of months into the project, Guadalupe and Cristina started to notice that the students were not as engaged. Ms. Zalles facilitated an anonymous vote which revealed that a majority of students did not want to move forward with the project. A cohort of four students decided to continue.
- Guadalupe and Cristina found that the smaller number of students were more engaged in the project, productivity increased and meetings ran more efficiently.
- Students who chose not to move forward with the project were overwhelmed with juggling other competing end-of-year activities and testing. In addition, the students seemed to like PhotoVoice as a self-contained activity but were not interested in moving beyond that initial effort.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Through the Photovoice process, youth looked at “model communities” while on their college campus visits and identified what made the communities healthy and what types of health services were being offered. They took photos answering these questions: What would make you want to go here? How can you bring it home?
- Students created a photo collage, then compared and contrasted what they saw to their own high school campus. They were inspired by college campus services for students such as meditation hours. This gave them ideas for services that could be offered at their school Health and Wellness Center.

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- The students planned to survey their peers to help determine the types of services of interest for the

Health and Wellness Center. However, a tragic community event derailed survey development focused on nutrition and physical activity. Therefore Guadalupe, Cristina and the youth were unable to move forward with their anticipated final product.

ACTION & OUTCOMES

- Students felt they were doing something important that was not just for themselves but for their younger siblings as well.
- Principal acknowledged the students’ important work.

NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- Guadalupe and Cristina plan to meet with the students at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year to see if they are interested in continuing with the YPAR project with a focus on nutrition and/or physical activity.
- They intend to start project activity at the beginning of the year this time.
- They would also like to recruit both AVID students and others from the general student body.
- Guadalupe and Cristina plan to continue building their presence on campus through tabling at lunch time, facilitating additional nutrition education classes on campus, and connecting with the health teachers.

“This project is important because it is going to affect not just us, but younger generations as well.”
—AVID Youth Leader



IMPERIAL

Calexico High School's Eco-Garden YPAR Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Imperial County UCCE staff facilitated an afterschool YPAR project with students at Calexico High School in collaboration with the local After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) Program and the school's Eco-Garden Club. Chris Gomez Wong, UCCE Community Educator, served as the project's main adult ally and facilitator; he worked with a team of four juniors and seniors to examine nutrition and food access issues at their school through observation and video interviews. The group met after school in the garden for an hour and a half each week but would transfer to a classroom during hot weather.

SETTING

- This school is located in Calexico, a small, agricultural community situated along the California-Mexico border. Many students live in Mexicali and cross the border daily to go to school.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 3,031 students, with 99% identifying as Hispanic/Latino; 52% were Spanish-speaking English Language Learners, 84% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Partnered with the afterschool ASSETs program and the school. Strong support from school administration and a key teacher advisor, Chef Nunez, who was culinary class teacher and a main point of contact on campus.
- Chris had established, long-standing community and school relationships before joining CalFresh Healthy Living, UC in January—grew up in Calexico, attended Calexico High School, and had already been working as an advisor to the school's Eco-Garden Club for a number of years.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- Recruited from the school's Eco-Garden Club beginning in January. The garden was well established and the club was a bit limited in what it could do, so initiating a YPAR project opened up a number of new opportunities for them.
- Started with 12 members but ended up with 4 consistent youth due to competing commitments.
- Hit the ground running by recruiting through the club—youth already had established relationships and channels of communication with each other and Chris.
- Transitioning to a more structured project from what had previously been a more informal setting presented challenges.

- While working with a well established group provided participants, the perception that it was closed to outsiders made recruiting new members difficult.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Concerned about rising childhood obesity rates and low physical fitness levels in their community discovered through publicly-available data sources, coupled with concerns about access to healthy, nutritious food at school. School has 2 separate campuses—one specifically for freshmen—and they focused on their campus for 10th, 11th and 12th grade students.
- Group did not like the food provided in the cafeteria and school has an “open campus” lunch policy but is surrounded by fast food establishments and food trucks mainly selling unhealthy options.

Research Question: Where are Calexico High School students getting their nutrition?

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Utilized video interviews and observations during the lunch hour at school; conducted 20 interviews with a random sample of fellow students.
- Youth were ready to take action and it was really beneficial for them to move beyond just discussing issues among themselves to getting out and engaging with their peers.
- Interview results and data helped validate some of the issues the group had already identified: interviewees also disliked the school’s cafeteria food and options.

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINAL PRODUCT

- Youth are advocating to participate in the Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) efforts at the district and school-site level as Student Wellness Ambassadors, to provide youth perspective to decision-making bodies and push for nutrition/food access policy changes (e.g. salad bar expansion; increased access to culturally-appropriate, vegetarian and vegan options; establish a farm-to-school program on campus and incorporate fresh produce from their garden into school meals).
- They aim to install 1-2 youth on the LSWP committee in the coming school year; other YPAR team members will serve as advisory group to support youth representatives.
- LSWP committee does not meet very often (it only convened once last year) and no youth are currently active members, so building relationships and ensuring meaningful youth participation in this context is their next challenge.

“Many of us wanted to try to stay healthy during the school year, and that wasn’t really a possibility because we don’t have many food options available to us.”
– Eco-Garden Club Youth Leader

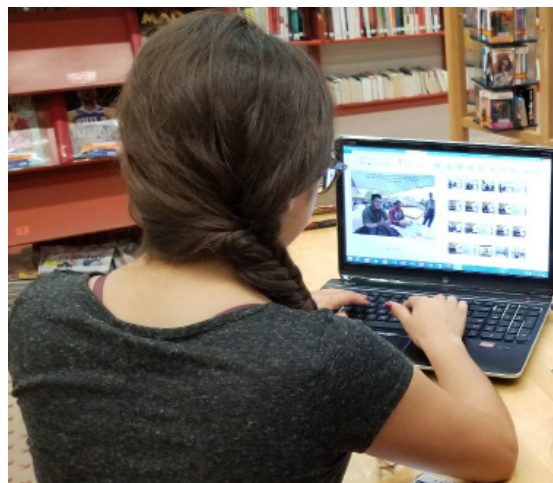
- Final product was a video with key interview clips and project highlights. Embedded video into a PowerPoint presentation and plan to use both media pieces to raise awareness among peers and recruit new members next year.

ACTION & OUTCOMES

- YPAR project showed youth they could be active participants in policy decisions that impact their lives and the lives of their peers via district wellness committee and community education.

NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- Two members graduated at the end of the year, but the two juniors will carry the group forward next year—will use their video as a promotional advertisement for recruitment and will seek new members from Chef Nunez’s culinary classes and the wider student body.
- Chris will implement a teens-as-teachers cooking academy program next year with students from Chef Nunez’s culinary classes. He would like to connect this effort with the YPAR work and some youth will probably participate in both programs.



“Since we’re already growing our own crops at the Eco-Garden Club, we would like to expand that into our school menu, that way we can establish a Farm-to-School program.”
– Eco-Garden Club Youth Leader



RIVERSIDE

Nicolet Middle School's YPAR Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Riverside County UCCE staff facilitated a YPAR project with students at Nicolet Middle School in the city of Banning. Emma Sandoval, UCCE Community Education Supervisor, served as the project's main adult ally and facilitator, working with a team of four 8th grade students to promote physical activity. The group met for an hour each week on the school campus during the ASB class period.

SETTING

- Project took place at a fairly small school with high needs and few resources in the city of Banning, a very rural community situated 30 miles east of the city of Riverside.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 933 students, with 67% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 12% non-Hispanic White, 8% Black or African American, 5% Asian and 4% American Indian or Alaska Native; 13% were either Spanish-speaking or Southeast Asian English Language Learners, 89% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Structured as an in-school Student Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) in collaboration with the Associated Student Body (ASB) leadership class and the school. Primary support provided by the district's Nutrition Services Specialist and school faculty and staff, including school librarian.
- UCCE Riverside staff had already been working with the school on the Shaping Healthy Choices Program.
- Holding meetings during school time was very challenging for both recruitment and programming, but holding their meetings after school was not really feasible.
- Very limited pool of potential recruits—students were only eligible to join the group if they had extracurricular activities scheduled during the same class period.
- Maintaining a consistent meeting space was a challenge.
- Short meeting sessions and limited project time outside of meetings meant time was always a concern—took longer to get through each step and did not feel like there was adequate time to keep it fun while also getting work accomplished.

- Emma got a promotion and new staff in the fall but continued supporting this group. Her new role and responsibilities created additional challenges for time management: had less time to prepare for meetings and support the project, and new staff members could not assist her.
- Nutrition Services Specialist planned and facilitated some meetings and activities focused on a Smarter Lunchroom Movement cafeteria makeover; accompanied the group to Sacramento to present a poster and give a speech at the SNAC Conference.
- Coordination was challenging in the fall—the Nutrition Services Specialist and Emma pursued separate agendas with the youth without a clear, shared understanding of the YPAR process—but this situation was resolved by mid-year.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- Had 3 students from ASB leadership class who returned from last year's initial YPAR effort.
- Youth-led recruitment process: presented program and applications to peers with extracurricular classes held at the same time as ASB to ensure they could actually participate in the meetings; process resulted in 1 more youth joining the group.
- Final group was a tight-knit team of 4 female 8th grade students.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Youth were concerned about the aesthetics of their school's cafeteria, low physical activity levels at their school and in their community, as well as Physical Education class quality.
- Interested in creating a walking trail on campus to improve mental and physical health—an alternative to what they saw as poor physical activity education and opportunities.

- Researched trail options and explored the idea of a multi-year project that could include an on-campus trail, a joint-use agreement, and eventually an off-campus extension of the trail.

Research Question: “Would a walking trail help increase opportunities for physical activity in our school community?”

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Issue identification process took a long time and youth got bogged down in the slow pace of progress, which pushed their research design and data collection stages to after winter break.
- Needed additional support and guidance transitioning into the research phase of the project—focus on a walking trail may have moved a bit too quickly towards recommending a solution before youth had conducted their research and analysis.
- Used USDA Food Atlas mapping site to analyze food access in the area. Putting Youth on the Map mapping tool and other publicly-available data sources provided physical activity data.
- Felt peers were tired of taking surveys, so the group preferred focus groups as a more interactive and engaging research method.
- Developed questions for their research, but process took quite a while to complete and was slowed by school testing in the spring and other scheduling conflicts. Principal was supportive of their research plan but they were unable to conduct their research before the school year ended.

OUTCOMES

- Funding issues prevented any changes to the cafeteria this year, but this is something they plan to pursue in the near future through the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement.
- Did not receive a hoped-for physical activity grant which could have supported next steps.
- Despite challenges, youth identified their participation in this project as a very positive experience that led them to change eating and physical activity behaviors.

NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM

SUSTAINABILITY

- All youth participants graduated at the end of this year and were apprehensive about continuing this project in high school during their freshman year; due to this and Emma's own time constraints, this YPAR project will not continue in the 2018-2019 school year.



IMPERIAL

Meadows Union Elementary School's Helping Hands Active Knights (HHAK)

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Imperial County UCCE staff facilitated their second consecutive YPAR project at Meadows Union Elementary School in collaboration with the local After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program. Paul Tabarez, UCCE Community Education Supervisor, returned as the project's main adult ally and facilitator, working with a team of 14 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The group met weekly on campus after school and focused on food waste in their cafeteria for this year's effort.

SETTING

- This K-8 school is located in the desert about 5 miles east of El Centro and 6 miles west of Holtville and surrounded by agricultural fields with mobile home parks interspersed throughout the region and no walkability.
- In 2016-2017, the school served 488 students, with 85% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 13% non-Hispanic White; 47% were Spanish-speaking English Language Learners, 67% eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

PROJECT DETAILS & PARTNERSHIPS

- Maintained same partners in Year 2. ASES provided coordination and logistical support, as well as funds, donating for group t-shirts.
- Strong school/district administrative support. However, staff turnover of key local partners and champions was an ongoing challenge: Paul focused on building and maintaining strong relationships with administrators and their successors to maintain school and district support.
- Paul's commitment to Meadows Union despite a promotion and new responsibilities helped maintain continuity, but also led him to cut training on youth leadership strategies like meeting planning and facilitation. New staff member, Chris, was able to assist during some Helping Hands Active Knights (HHAK) meetings and was very helpful since it was a bigger group this year.

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

- First youth-led recruitment process. HHAK members presented to ASES program peers and created application process. Final group included 6 returning youth and 8 new members, majority Latina.
- The process was very successful but lengthy, delaying YPAR project until after winter break—will shorten in future.

ISSUE & RESEARCH QUESTION

- Last year, the group was concerned about water access at school and a playground stencil project in addition to physical activity. Since the school had plans for new water stations and the stencil project was successfully completed, their school's lunchroom became a focus. Food waste emerged organically as a common concern across discussions and activities. Paul let the youth participants truly drive the process, and they settled on analyzing food waste at their school to assess how many fruits and vegetables are being wasted during lunch time.
- Paul communicated with the principal, laying the groundwork for administrative support and consulted with the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC State Office team for guidance.

RESEARCH METHOD(S), DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

- Youth participants audited their own eating habits and then conducted a plate waste study in their lunchroom using observation and photography. Additionally, they measured the amount of fruits and vegetables wasted by processing 363 food trays. They tried to be as careful as possible with their framing so as not to place blame on the students or stigmatize them for wasting food.

- Paul drew from previous experience and PHI CWN and CalFresh Healthy Living, UC State Office expertise to support youth data collection and analysis. Youth were initially a little discouraged by what they perceived to be low result numbers, but Paul helped them use single day numbers to extrapolate school waste for the year. He also helped them think about this amount multiplied by the number of other schools in the area to demonstrate how waste adds up over time and multiple locations.
- A reflection log helped the group process and capture their thoughts and quotes.

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINAL PRODUCT

- HHAK members generated recommendations for their school:
 - Install a share table and a share fridge in the cafeteria to save unused food.
 - Implement taste testings and smaller food portions for some items.
 - Improve signage to let students know about these changes and their rationales.
- The group is also interested in supporting composting and recycling at school and is exploring logistics and regulations for donating unused food to other community programs.
- Their final report was created in PowerPoint. In a novel use of technology, they incorporated embedded video segments of the youth speaking within the slides. Youth were able to re-record their presentation videos as many times as they needed to get them just right.

“Did you know that 40% of all food in America is wasted? Let’s make a change!”
– HHAK Youth Leader

ACTION & OUTCOMES

- Paul followed up with key school and district decisionmakers over the summer, and the group's final report presentation was shared with the superintendent and the outgoing principal. Their efforts were acknowledged at a School Board meeting at the end of the school year, too. The Food Services Director supports installing a share table and would like to formulate an official partnership with the HHAK group for the next year school year. They have planned a big ribbon cutting ceremony with the youth for the table's unveiling.

NEXT STEPS & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- In the fall, the youth will continue to advocate for their recommended PSE changes with school and district administrators. They expect to have 12 returning youth leaders. While they will be starting with a good-sized group already, they still want to recruit new members because most of the returning youth will be 8th graders and will graduate at the end of the next school year. The youth really want to accomplish something big next year and leave a lasting legacy before they move on to high school.



“We decided to do a food waste study because it is a serious problem in not only our school, but also around the world.”
– HHAK Youth Leader

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For more information, program partners can be reached via the following links:

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UC Davis Center for Regional Change: crcinfo@ucdavis.edu

Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition: info@wellness.phi.org

UC 4-H: ca4h@ucanr.edu

