

# *Voices Into Action*



## **2014 SOUTHEAST RALEIGH COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT**





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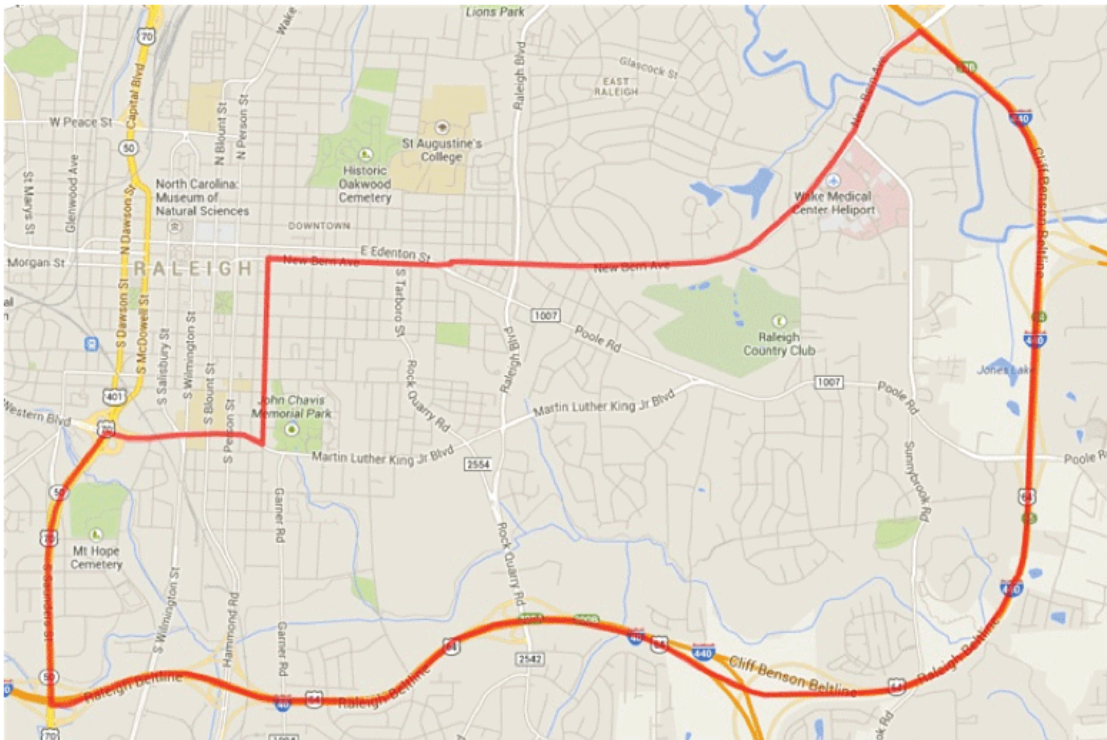
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## INTRODUCTION

This assessment is part of Voices into Action: The Families, Food, and Health Project (VIA). Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, Voices into Action is a partnership between NC State University, NC A&T University, and NC Cooperative Extension. We draw on research and community partnerships in three counties (Lee, Harnett and Wake) to encourage and support projects and activities that impact food access and places to be active.

Community mentors, community partners, students at NC State, and Voices into Action researchers conducted this assessment of food

resources in Southeast Raleigh between 2012 and 2014. We focus on the area of Southeast Raleigh identified in the map below, with the southern and eastern borders designated by the Raleigh Beltline, and New Bern Avenue marking the northern border. By listening to community voices and mapping local food resources, we hope to better understand community priorities around food access. The results of this food assessment will inform our future work in Southeast Raleigh, as we build on community assets and the work of our partners in order to improve access to healthy and affordable food and places to be active.



Map of Southeast Raleigh

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voices into Action: The Families, Food and Health Project (Voices into Action, or VIA) is a USDA-funded research and outreach project in three counties in North Carolina: Harnett, Lee and Wake. The project is a collaboration between North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and North Carolina Cooperative Extension. We partner with community organizations and residents in each of these counties to promote access to healthy foods and places to be active.

Our work starts with listening to the VOICES of community members. We interviewed 126 mothers and grandmothers across these three counties (40 in Southeast Raleigh) to learn about the issues they face when feeding their families. Some of the key themes that emerged from these conversations included: 1) the prevalence and challenges of accessing food, 2) the importance of faith communities, and 3) the assets provided through community and neighborhood organizations. In addition to hearing these voices, we conducted community workshops, where community organizations and Southeast Raleigh residents came together to identify assets and priorities for action. Assets included faith communities and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Participants noted that it was important for organizations to promote respect and empowerment, in addition to providing services that are free or affordable for families.

Our work also expanded INTO the community, as we learned more about how organizations, individuals and programs in Southeast Raleigh were addressing some of these key themes and priorities identified through interviews and workshops. Working

with community partners and mentors and students at North Carolina State University, we interviewed 11 food pantry directors and surveyed faith communities, to learn what they were doing regarding food access and physical activity in their community. We found out that many congregations (59% across three counties) allowed residents and groups to use their facilities for physical activity. Facilities included gyms, classroom space, playgrounds and open areas. This information can be publicized in the community, to meet the needs for physical activity described by mothers, grandmothers, and in community workshops. All of the food pantry directors we surveyed indicated that they had experienced an increased demand for their services over the past year. Most (70%) of these directors felt that they were not currently meeting the needs of their clients. Our goal is to connect these pantry directors with vital resources, like fresh produce or additional donation sources, in order to support their work.

We also worked with North Carolina State University students to take an inventory of the foods available in the four grocery and 25 corner stores in Southeast Raleigh. We learned that healthier foods, like low-fat milk, fruits and vegetables, and whole grain breads are more available and cheaper at grocery stores than corner stores in the area. When comparing the prices of bread, milk, apples, and canned corn, corner stores charged 66% more, on average, than grocery stores. This is particularly important, given the closure of two major grocery stores in this community in early 2013. We hope to partner with corner store owners, Cooperative Extension, and the Health Department to encourage healthier options in stores.

Finally, this project aims to put research into ACTION, by partnering with community organizations, carrying out nutrition education programs, cultivating community-based action groups, and funding innovative mini-grant projects that provide sustainable solutions to the issues addressed by community residents and partners. In partnership with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), we held four Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More classes (three in Southeast Raleigh, one in Harnett County) and five EFNEP classes (three in Harnett County, two in Southeast Raleigh) in 2013. We piloted three EFNEP classes in food pantries (two in Harnett County, one in Southeast Raleigh), because food pantry directors had told us that nutrition education was the top resource they wanted to provide to their clients to promote health. Among the 61 participants in all of the EFNEP and Faithful Families classes, 100% showed a positive change in consumption of at least one food group (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, or dairy) after the final session.

Our work continues through Healthy Southeast Raleigh, the community-based action group that was created in 2013 following the community workshops referenced previously. This group is comprised of diverse stakeholders, and they have carried out or supported projects such as hosting a community resource day to publicize local projects and assets, and creating a community resource guide to connect residents to vital resources related to food and physical activity. This group also advises and reviews mini-grant projects. To date, VIA has awarded ten community-based projects across Southeast Raleigh, including

fitness classes and places for kids to be active in local churches, community garden and growing projects with a focus on youth, nutrition education classes, the development of a food cooperative, and a mobile produce market.

By listening to community residents, we aim to continue to hear and build upon the VOICES of the people of Southeast Raleigh. Their priorities are clear:

- To increase access to healthy, affordable foods;
- To identify and support local farmers and places where produce is sold;
- To partner with faith communities and other organizations to improve access to places for children to be active; and
- To build community and organizational power to serve residents of Southeast Raleigh.

Along with our community partners, we will work to help put these priorities INTO ACTION in the coming years. To learn more about the ongoing work of Voices into Action and our community partners, visit [www.voicesintoaction.org](http://www.voicesintoaction.org).

# VOICES

We were very intentional about the name of this project – Voices into Action. The first word of our name implies the essential first step in any community-based project: listening to, hearing, and being attentive to the many voices that make up a community.

We began our work by listening to the voices of mothers and grandmothers of young children in Southeast Raleigh. They told us about their experiences feeding their families in challenging times. We heard about raising children, and the difficulties and joys of parenting. We also heard their visions and thoughts about their communities: what their neighborhoods were like, where their children played, and what they would change in their community if given the chance. We spent a good deal of time in the homes of several of these families, learning more about how they cooked and ate together, going shopping with them, and even visiting the doctor's office or Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program appointments.

In addition to talking with these mothers and grandmothers, we carried out several community workshops, to learn about how organizations and residents prioritized the issues around access to food and places to be active. We also asked them to talk about the organizations and programs doing the best work in Southeast Raleigh. The goals identified at these workshops set the stage for the work we continue today.

As we listened to the voices of the people of Southeast Raleigh, several key themes emerged:

- **Food security:** Many community members talked about their need for accessible, affordable food. People relied on food pantries and other emergency food providers to make ends meet, making these organizations crucial in Southeast Raleigh.
- **Faith communities:** Community members and partners talked about the importance of faith communities, particularly during tough times. They wondered how to get congregations working together to improve access to healthy foods and places to be active.
- **Food access:** Especially in the wake of the closing of the neighborhood's only supermarket in early 2013, community members and partners told us that they wanted to improve access to healthy, affordable foods by promoting avenues like food cooperatives, mobile markets, and other creative solutions to bring food to people who need it.

We believe that good community work begins by listening, and we hope that you learn from the voices in the following pages.



## VOICES OF FAMILIES IN SOUTHEAST RALEIGH

One of our goals with this project was to give mothers and grandmothers the opportunity to voice their experiences with feeding their families. In 2012 and 2013, we interviewed 40 mothers and grandmothers, with children ages 2-8, who lived in Southeast Raleigh. The women who invited us into their homes told us about what they ate, where they bought their food, how they prepared it, and what they thought about their communities. Some of the key issues that they discussed included food security and the importance of faith communities and other organizations, particularly during tough times.

### Food security and access to food

According to a recent Feeding America Report, 15% of Wake County families are food insecure, which means that they do not have enough safe, nutritious food to live an active lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> Among the families that we talked to, the percentage was much higher; 53% of households were food insecure. Most families (90%) received SNAP benefits, which they said were a crucial food resource, but families still struggled to put food on the table.

Southeast Raleigh mothers and grandmothers told us they faced many different challenges when it came to food access. With only a handful of grocery stores in the area, most people had to travel several miles to get to stores where they could buy affordable food. Many families lived within walking distance of a corner store, but they told us that prices at corner stores were often much higher than at large supermarkets. The mothers and grand-

mothers we talked to were also often frustrated at the lack of options available at corner stores, wishing they would carry “more than liquor and cigarettes.” For these reasons, most mothers and grandmothers still chose to do the bulk of their shopping outside of their own neighborhoods. This was especially hard for people who did not have access to reliable transportation. Nearly half of the mothers and grandmothers we interviewed did not have a car of their own; they had to rely on buses, cabs, or rides from family and friends to get to the store.

Because it could be difficult and expensive to get to the store, many mothers and grandmothers shopped only once or twice per month. Less frequent shopping trips meant having to carry a lot of food at once, and finding space to store it at home. This also made it hard to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, which went bad after only a few days. Mothers and grandmothers also felt discouraged by the closing of the neighborhood’s only supermarket in 2013. As one grandmother expressed, this grocery store was her “rock,” since it was close to home. Without a grocery store nearby, people had to spend more money to travel in order to get to a store where they could shop.

“[Ideally] I would get a lot of—I would get salads and vegetables. ... [but] those are perishable things and they go bad really fast, so it’s hard to keep it in the fridge or even the freezer. To keep them fresh though, you would have to constantly keep buying those and ...—usually moms that do have food stamps, we get it for the month...So we’re shopping for the month at that one point in time because we don’t have the money to keep traveling back and forth every day to the market to go grab things.”  
~ Southeast Raleigh mother

<sup>1</sup> Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap 2013. Available from [http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap/~/\\_media/Files/a-map-2011/NC\\_AllCountiesMMG\\_2011.ashx?.pdf](http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap/~/_media/Files/a-map-2011/NC_AllCountiesMMG_2011.ashx?.pdf).

Despite these challenges, mothers and grandmothers in Southeast Raleigh developed resourceful strategies, like shopping sales at multiple stores, using canned or frozen fruits and vegetables, and buying family-size bulk

packages of food. They also told us that their neighbors helped each other during tough times—many mothers and grandmothers we interviewed frequently traded meals within their community and shared in feeding neighborhood children. Additionally, some people expressed hope for innovative alternatives that could fill the food access gap, from mobile markets to new grocery stores.

“What I consider healthy? My pastor. Because I never hear her talking about her health problems. Like, she’s always on the go, she exercises, she walks, she’s just healthy, she’s great. And she’s never stressed out because that’s also part of being healthy too, is your emotions I think.”

~Southeast Raleigh mother

### Faith communities

Mothers and grandmothers told us that the faith communities in Southeast Raleigh had created a culture of hospitality. Many mothers and grandmothers enjoyed meals at their churches, and considered faith communities to be among the most important organizations in their neighborhoods. Some of the people who visited food pantries told us that they felt that church-based food pantries had fresher,

more appealing foods. One mother said that she preferred visiting the church-based food pantries, because “churches make you feel like a guest instead of someone in need.”

About half the mothers and grandmothers we interviewed regularly attended religious services, but they said that churches provided much more than places to worship, meals, and food pantry services. Mothers and grandmothers also talked about the help that churches provided with childcare, children’s homework, and counseling. For many mothers in Southeast Raleigh, pastors were active and visible in the community and often served as role models for healthy lifestyles. Altogether, the strong and widely present faith communities in Southeast Raleigh helped to provide a caring, judgment-free safety net for residents, leaving them feeling welcomed and supported.

In general, mothers and grandmothers in Southeast Raleigh told us how important it was for them to have enough healthy, affordable food to feed their families. They appreciated the care and support they received from faith communities and other community organizations, particularly during difficult times. Our next section on community voices echoes some of these themes.



Dancing in the Park session hosted by the Southeast Raleigh Assembly (SERA) at a Healthy Southeast Raleigh event.

# COMMUNITY VOICES DRIVING COMMUNITY CHANGE

Building on what we had learned from mothers and grandmothers, we conducted workshops with community organizations and residents in Southeast Raleigh. We held workshops on February 22 and 23 of 2013 at Martin Street

Baptist Church in Raleigh. The workshops focused on identifying community assets and priorities related to access to healthy foods and places to be active in Southeast Raleigh.

On the first day of the workshops, we invited organizational representatives to share their

perspectives. The second day brought community residents to the table. The two groups came together in the afternoon of the second day to discuss how to move forward, given the assets and priorities identified by both groups.

When talking about the history of the community, two key events came up for both groups:

- The closing of both Kroger locations in Southeast Raleigh; and
- The election (and re-election) of Barack Obama.

While the Kroger closing was discussed by both groups as a crisis point in the community, they also talked about how it could be an opportunity for growth and a renewal of local ownership in the food system (for example, by creating a local food cooperative). Also, President Obama's election marked another point of opportunity for the community, in that it instilled hope in community members who had previously felt disenfranchised.

During each workshop, we asked people to identify the organizations and programs that they thought were doing the best work in Southeast Raleigh. The two figures below list these exemplary organizations and the reasons that workshop participants described them as such, in order of their importance.

"There is a principle that I work with, and the principle is basically you can't empower community. The community is already empowered. You can only help them to see the power they already have."

~Organizational representative on empowerment

Table 1: Exemplary Organizations

Organizational Representatives	Community Residents
Inter-Faith Food Shuttle	Grocery stores
Parks and Recreation	Faith communities
Faith communities	Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
Southeast Raleigh Assembly (SERA)	Parks
Cooperative Extension	Neighbor to Neighbor

Table 2: Reasons Organizations Are Exemplary

Organizational Representatives	Community Residents
Affordability	Provide food
Love for the community	Respect for the community
Respect and inclusiveness	Provide free services or financial assistance
Build power for the community/ grassroots programs	Provide afterschool help
Thoughtful and strategic	Nearby/in the neighborhood

Both groups named faith communities as some of the most important resources in the community. Additionally, community members discussed the importance of the WIC program because they helped with food costs and provided access to nutritious foods. Both groups appreciated that the exemplary organizations provided services that were free or very affordable. In terms of why these places and programs were important, organizational representatives and community residents said it was because they showed respect for and encouraged empowerment in the community. As one community member stated, “Regardless of the risk... they come anyway. They roll up their sleeves and show you how to do a garden, show you how to cook and give you advice, rather than being judgmental.”

“Well the ones we did choose, I feel like their hospitality is awesome, you know, because they’re willing to help... They make you feel like, you know, like, I don’t know, they make you feel like a guest instead of just a person that’s in need.”

~ Community resident discussing the importance of respect

Drawing on the assets identified above, the group identified the following priorities for future action:

- 1. Communication:** Facilitating clear communication among community members and between organizations and the community.
- 2. Gardening:** Sharing existing gardening resources with residents and organizations, and expanding gardens at various levels.
- 3. Education and Knowledge:** Sharing information about programs with families and organizations and working with communities to create useful programs.
- 4. Community Organizing:** Recognizing the power that community residents have in their neighborhoods and putting ideas into action.

In the next section, we discuss some of the additional assessments we carried out, to learn how to put these VOICES INTO ACTION in Southeast Raleigh.

# INTO

After hearing the voices of the people in Southeast Raleigh, we partnered with community organizations to address several strategic priorities, including:

- Learning how to get healthy foods, particularly produce, to families that needed it most;
- Finding out what food pantries were doing to meet the needs of food insecure families;
- Determining how faith communities could provide spaces for families to be more active; and
- Tracking the foods that were available in supermarkets, corner stores, and convenience stores.

To answer these questions, we carried out several surveys and interviews, with faith communities, food pantries, and at corner or convenience stores. Before taking action, we needed to have a better sense of the scope of the issues facing Southeast Raleigh and the assets that were already there. What resources did people have? How did community groups and organizations meet the needs of the families they served? What additional support did these exemplary programs and organizations need? How could we build bridges and partnerships? This work is the INTO part of Voices into Action.

Zumba class at First Baptist Church in Sanford.



## MOVING MORE IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH: FACILITY USE AGREEMENTS

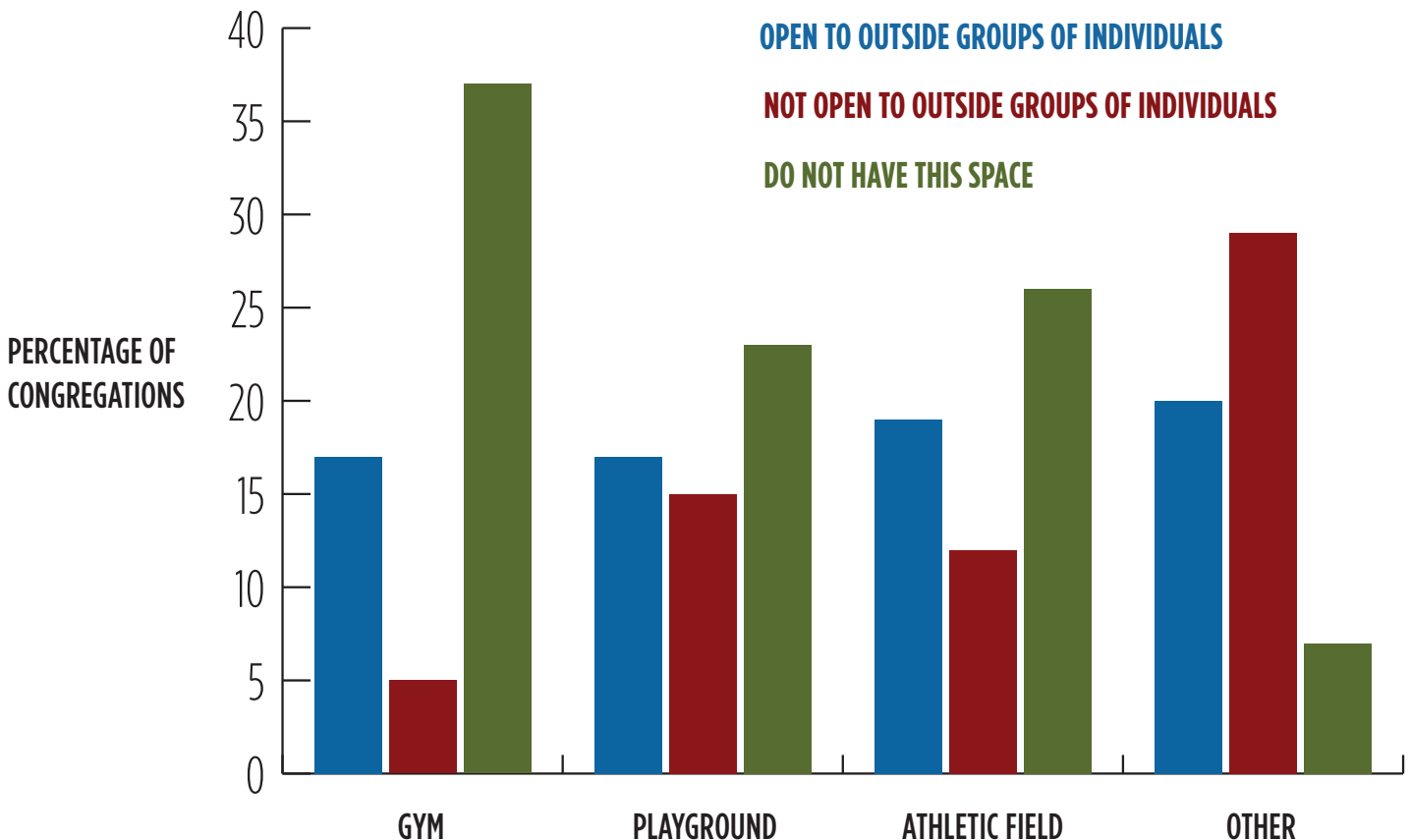
In our workshops and our interviews, many people told us about the need for safe spaces for children to be active. At the asset mapping workshops, people talked about partnering with faith communities to make these spaces available to children and their families. Therefore, in 2013, we set out to learn more about what faith communities were already doing to promote physical activity. We knew that some congregations, like First Baptist Church of Sanford, had large gyms they opened up to the community for exercise and group classes. We also knew that other congregations, like Mount

Peace Baptist Church in Southeast Raleigh, used their parking lots for walking groups after worship services.

We partnered with the Community Transformation Grant Program (CTG), the North Carolina Council of Churches Partners in Health and Wholeness Program, and Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More to carry out a brief survey with faith communities in Southeast Raleigh and Lee and Harnett Counties. Working with the Health Department in each county, we developed a list of

Figure 1

### FACILITY USAGE IN FAITH COMMUNITIES



230 congregations. We developed both an online and paper version of the survey.

In total, we received 66 surveys, for a response rate of 29%. We received 18 surveys (27%) from Harnett County, 22 surveys (33%) from Lee County, and 20 surveys (30%) from Southeast Raleigh. Ten percent of respondents did not identify their county.

We learned that 59% of faith communities allowed outside groups or individuals to use their facilities for physical activity. As shown in Figure 1, facilities included gyms, playgrounds, and athletic spaces. Some of the other facilities that faith communities listed as open to groups or individuals included Fellowship Halls, basement spaces, multi-purpose rooms, indoor walking tracks, picnic shelters, and parking lots. Most congregations had a mix of formal and informal policies allowing usage of the spaces.

For the congregations that did not allow outside groups to use their space, we asked them to explain why. The top two reasons given were a lack of space and concerns about the cost of maintaining the spaces. Liability concerns, or worries about lawsuits and insurance, ranked third. Some congregations reported that they had not been asked about use of their space or that they did not know where to begin the process.

We were excited to see that among the congregations that did open their spaces up to outside groups or individuals, 45% said that they were willing to share their information with the

community. Each county is creating a resource guide with this information, through the community-based action groups. The Southeast Raleigh Health and Wellness Resource Guide has been completed and is available on the Voices into Action website ([www.voicesintoaction.org](http://www.voicesintoaction.org)).

We are partnering with the CTG Project, North Carolina Council of Churches, and Faithful Families to create tools and trainings for faith communities that want to open up their spaces for physical activity usage. The results of this survey will help us address the key concerns for faith communities when opening up their space to children and their families for physical activity.





# RESPONDING TO FOOD INSECURITY: CONVERSATIONS WITH FOOD PANTRY DIRECTORS

In our interviews and asset-mapping workshops, many people identified food pantries as an important resource in Southeast Raleigh. We surveyed the directors of the food pantries in order to learn more about what they were doing and the services they provided, and to learn how we, along with our partners, could best support them.

We identified 15 food pantries in Southeast Raleigh, and completed interviews with 11 pantry directors in 2013 and 2014. These directors gave us a great deal of insight into their perspectives as providers, as well as the needs that they saw among their clients.

The food pantries varied in size, though they all served a significant number of individuals – between 100 and 2000 per month. The median number of clients served per month at each food pantry was 500.

One of the most telling things we learned from pantry directors was how hard things had gotten for them in recent years. One hundred percent of directors said that the demand for their services had increased in the past year. Most (70%) indicated that they felt that they were falling short of meeting their clients' needs, and three pantries reported that they had turned clients away at least once due to a lack of food.

Pantries relied on donations and purchased food to get food for their clients. On average, 54% of the food pantries' supply was donated, with the rest being purchased by the food pantry. One pantry we surveyed, however,

received only 10% of their food in donations and had to use their own funds to buy most of their food. Directors told us that the foods they needed most were non-perishable items like canned goods and cereal.

The pantry directors worked hard to provide their clients with a variety of foods, but struggled to provide

frozen vegetables, and only had a limited availability of dairy products.

On average, directors said that they provided canned vegetables almost 11 months out of the year, and fresh vegetables and meat about ten months out of the year.

Fresh and canned fruits were also frequently available, about eight or nine months of the year.

Frozen vegetables were never available

at six of the food pantries; of the remaining five, four were only able to provide frozen vegetables one-third of the time, at most. Dairy products were available about half of the time. Pantries' lack of freezer and refrigeration space limited their ability to store perishable items like frozen foods and dairy products.

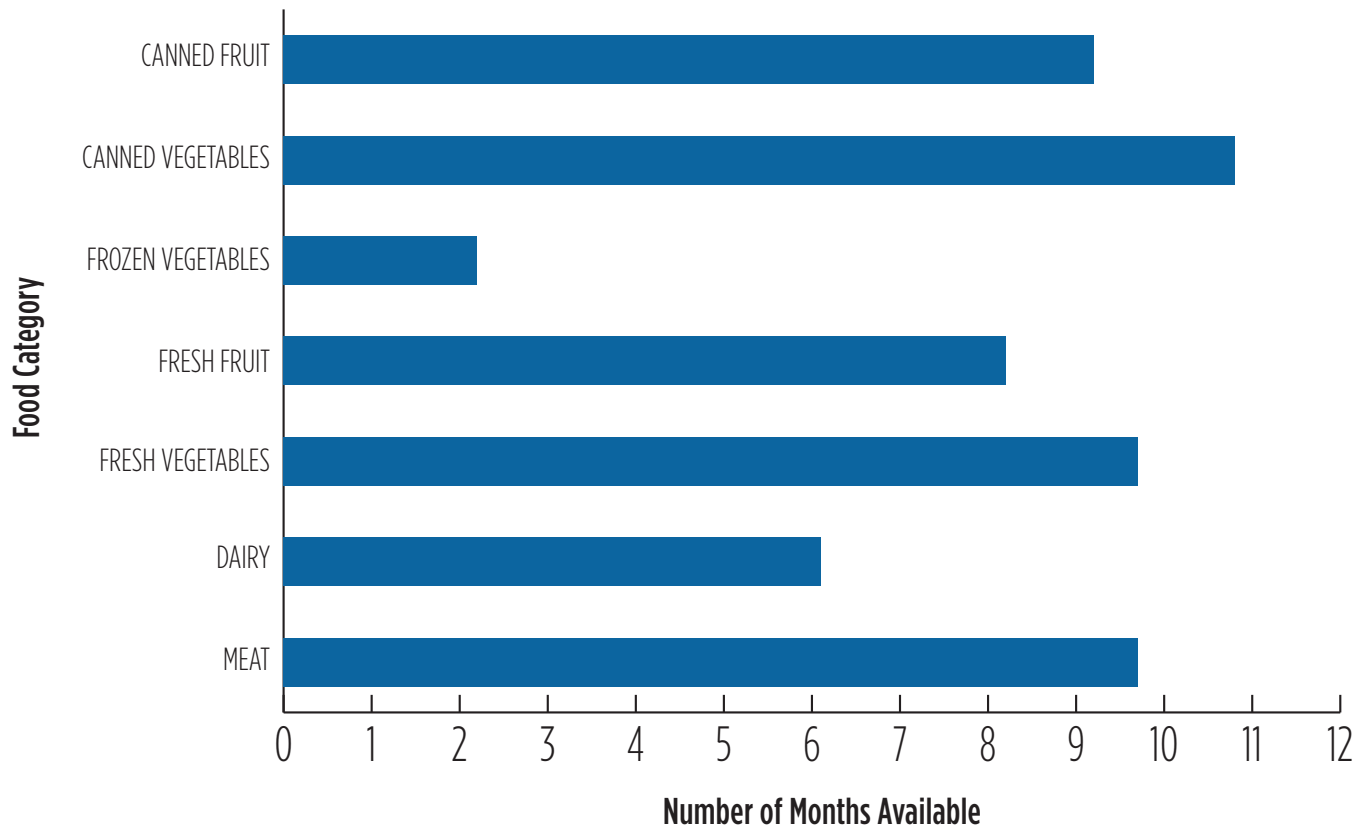
## A Sample of Food Pantry Missions

"To service those in need, wipe out hunger in the community, provide healthy food items, and teach about nutrition."

"To help the people of Wake County. To give food and feed as healthy as possible."

"A way by which we can find people's true needs to get them the help they need."

## AVAILABILITY OF FOOD AT FOOD PANTRIES IN SOUTHEAST RALEIGH



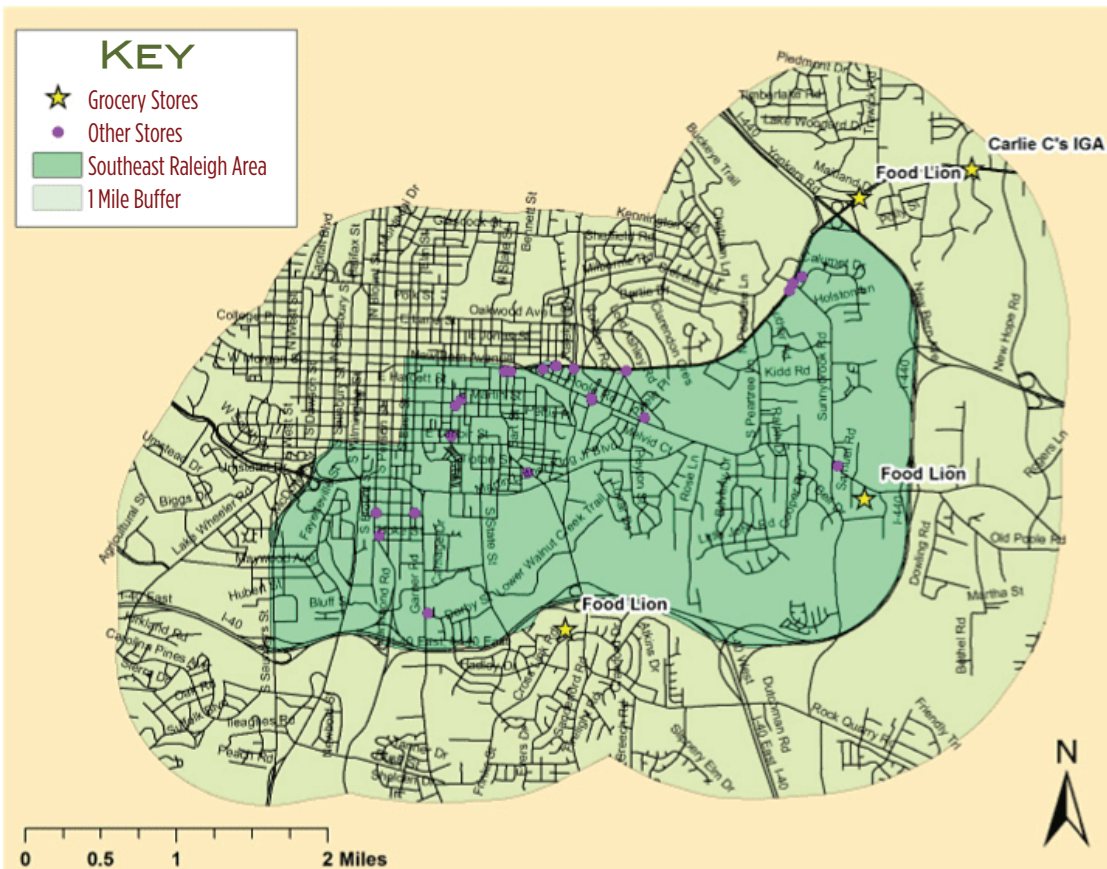
Finally, we asked the food pantry directors what additional services they would like to be able to offer. The overwhelming majority of pantry directors said they would like to offer nutrition education to their clients. Southeast Raleigh's community-based action

group, Healthy Southeast Raleigh, is using this information to continue our work with the food pantry directors, by piloting nutrition education classes in pantries and learning about how to connect pantries with sources of fresh produce and other healthy foods.

# WHERE DO WE BUY OUR FOOD?: CORNER STORE ASSESSMENTS

In addition to connecting with faith communities and food pantries, the people we spoke to wanted to learn more about the types of foods available in local stores in Southeast Raleigh. Students from the “Food and Society” class at North Carolina State University (Spring 2012 and Spring 2014) carried out corner store assessments at 25 corner stores and four supermarkets in Southeast Raleigh. We defined a corner store as a convenience store or gas station that sells food.

We began by mapping out all of the stores in the county, driving through a defined area and mapping each store within the boundary. Students then used the Yale Rudd Center’s adapted version of the Nutrition Environment Measurement Survey (NEMS) to assess the types of foods available for sale in these stores and to compare prices.



Map of Corner Stores and Grocery Stores in Southeast Raleigh

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, although fresh fruits and vegetables were widely available in all of the supermarkets, they were rarely available in the corner and convenience stores. Many corner and convenience stores did not have any fresh produce. The most commonly available item was apples.

Fresh fruits were available in all of the grocery stores; however, options for purchasing fresh fruits were limited in convenience stores (see Table 1).

Table 1:  
Availability  
of Fresh Fruits

	Grocery Stores (n=4)	Convenience Stores (n=25)
Bananas	100%	8%
Apples	100%	12%
Oranges	100%	8%
Cantaloupe	100%	0%
Grapes	100%	4%
Strawberries	100%	0%
Pears	100%	0%

Table 2:  
Availability of  
Fresh Vegetables

	Grocery Stores (n=4)	Convenience Stores (n=25)
Carrots	100%	8%
Tomatoes	100%	8%
Lettuce	75%	4%
Sweet peppers	100%	8%
Broccoli	100%	4%
Cauliflower	100%	4%
Cabbage	100%	4%

Canned vegetables were more commonly available in corner stores (Table 3).

	Grocery Stores (n=4)	Convenience Stores (n=25)
Canned corn (15.5 oz.)	100%	8%
Canned green beans (15.5 oz.)	68%	12%

Table 3:  
Availability of  
Canned Vegetables

We also assessed the availability of milk and bread, and found that healthier options like reduced-fat milk (2%, 1%, or skim) and whole wheat bread were less available in corner stores (see Table 4).

	Grocery Stores (n=4)	Convenience Stores (n=25)
White bread (loaf)	\$2.27	88%
Whole wheat bread (loaf)	\$2.19	24%
Low-fat milk (0.5 gal)	\$3.99	48%
Whole milk	\$3.63	68%

Table 4:  
Availability and Price  
of Bread and Milk

Finally, as shown in Table 5, we compared prices of a few key staples, and found that across the five items (white bread, whole wheat bread, milk, apples, and canned corn), convenience stores charged 66% more than grocery stores for the same item. This observation was particularly significant given the closure of two major grocery stores in this area, and our finding that more than half of the mothers we interviewed did not have access to a car.

	Grocery Stores	Convenience Stores
White bread (loaf)	\$3.42	\$3.41
Whole wheat bread (loaf)	\$3.82	\$4.19
Milk (0.5 gal)	\$2.76	\$3.40
Apples (lb)	\$0.56	\$1.94
Canned corn (1 can)	\$1.16	\$1.74

Table 5:  
Comparing Prices

We are working with North Carolina Cooperative Extension to partner with store owners

to increase access to healthy items. We hope to partner with store owners to learn about their priorities, including marketing, customer needs, and partnerships with farmers and other local growers. We aim to use this assessment to create store environments that promote healthy, affordable foods.

# ACTION

Our work is carried out *in* communities and *by* communities. In this section, we explore the ways that Southeast Raleigh residents and organizations are putting their voices into action, by increasing access to healthy foods and places to be active in their communities.

We began our work by talking to key stakeholders in Southeast Raleigh, including Cooperative Extension, faith communities, day care centers, Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, community organizers, the Health Department, and food pantries. We had individual meetings with the leaders of each of these organizations in order to learn more about the community from their perspectives.



Working with our community partners, so far, we have focused on several concrete strategies:

- Nutrition Education Classes through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP): The mothers and grandmothers we interviewed talked about the importance of having consistent information about healthy eating. Food pantry directors indicated that they wanted to offer educational opportunities for their clients. To meet these needs, we are working with NC EFNEP to carry out healthy eating classes in food pantries, churches, and community organizations.
- Community-Based Action Groups: After the workshops that we held in 2013, we invited participants to join a community group that would begin working on the strategic priorities identified in the sessions. This group, Healthy Southeast Raleigh, is still running today. It forms the backbone of the community-based work that we do. This group sets priorities for action, helps to review and revise mini-grants, and develops partnerships to carry out effective projects in the community.
- Mini-Grants: We have funded mini-grant projects that support the VIA mission and the priorities identified by mothers, residents, and county organizations. These projects vary in scope, and have included community gardens, mobile markets, faith-based physical activity programs, and nutrition education.

## PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING THROUGH EDUCATION: OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH EFNEP

In our community workshops, conversations with mothers and grandmothers, and interviews with food pantry directors, we learned that nutrition education was important to many people in Southeast Raleigh. We have partnered with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to offer nutrition education in various community settings, including food pantries, faith communities, and non-profit or community organizations. We have also partnered with the Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More Program (Faithful Families) to carry out faith-based nutrition and physical activity programs.

Our EFNEP and Faithful Families partners at North Carolina Cooperative Extension worked with us to provide four Faithful Families classes (three in Southeast Raleigh, one in Harnett County) and five EFNEP classes (three in Harnett County, two in Southeast Raleigh) in 2013. These EFNEP classes were held in many community settings in Southeast Raleigh, including a food pantry and neighborhood organization. In 2013, 61 people participated in these classes, across both counties. When we consider all of the members of the participants' households, this means that 196 people in total were affected.

EFNEP and Faithful Families classes help participants to learn how to shop for, prepare, budget for, and serve healthier meals. Participants also learn about the benefits of daily physical activity, including easy ways to be active during their busy lives. Each class includes a recipe and food demonstration, so participants are able to taste these healthy foods. Additionally, Faithful

Families classes encourage participants to look at the congregation as a whole, and to think about how the faith community can make eating smart and moving more the easier choice in their places of worship. They do this by adopting healthy eating or physical activity policies, creating gardens or walking trails, and starting walking or exercise groups.



**EFNEP**  
EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION  
EDUCATION PROGRAM

Participants in these classes reported important changes in their nutrition behaviors and practices. Across all nine classes:

- ▶ 100% of participants showed a positive change in consumption of at least one food group at exit (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, or dairy).
- ▶ 65% of participants increased the number of servings of vegetables that they consumed.
- ▶ Participants reported an average cost savings of \$134.00/month on their food bills.
- ▶ 56% of participants showed improvement in shopping with a grocery list.
- ▶ 60% reported an improvement in using nutrition facts to make food choices.
- ▶ 86% of participants showed improvements in one or more food resource management practices (avoiding running out of food at the end of the month, using a grocery list, or planning meals).
- ▶ 88% of participants showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices (preparing food without adding salt, reading nutrition labels, or eating breakfast).

Three of these nine classes were held at food pantries, because we heard from food pantry directors that offering nutrition education classes was one of their priorities. Of the 66 participants mentioned above, 11 completed classes in food pantries.

Here are some results from the subset of food pantry classes:

- 100% of participants showed a positive change in consumption of at least one food group at exit (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, or dairy).
- 73% of participants reported improvements in shopping with a grocery list.
- 73% of participants reported improvement in no longer running out of food at the end of the month.
- 100% of participants showed improvement in one or more food resource management practices (avoiding running out of food at the end of the month, using a grocery list, or planning meals).

- 82% of participants showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices (preparing food without adding salt, reading nutrition labels, or eating breakfast).

In all of these classes, we worked with our partners at Cooperative Extension to tailor classes to each unique setting. For example, classes at one Harnett County food pantry incorporated fresh fruits and vegetables from the pantry's on-site community garden. Participants were able to taste delicious, local foods each week, as the nutrition educator adapted recipes to include ingredients like lima beans, tomatoes, and cucumbers. One of the faith communities invited participants to come thirty minutes early to exercise together using materials and DVDs purchased through a Voices into Action mini-grant. Additionally, thanks to a grant that EFNEP received from Food Lion, all food pantry classes included a grocery store tour, so participants could practice the skills they learned in class, like reading nutrition labels and unit pricing.

As we continue this partnership in 2014, we are looking forward to new opportunities for nutrition education. These opportunities may include youth programs in after-school settings, additional partnerships with faith communities and food pantries, and connecting with Latino congregations with the Faithful Families program.



EFNEP Program Associate Debbie Stephenson leads a grocery store tour to help people learn to shop for healthier foods.



# COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND PUTTING PLANS INTO ACTION

After the asset-mapping workshops that we held in 2013, we invited interested Southeast Raleigh residents and community organizations to join a working group to identify key priorities and discuss next steps. The goal for this group was to build on the assets identified during the workshops in order to create programs, policies, and sustainable changes that would improve access to healthy foods and places to be active in Southeast Raleigh.

## Building Partnerships

We held a follow-up meeting for interested community partners in March 2013. The priority for the first few meetings was to learn about the work of each stakeholder, and to determine how to support and coordinate these efforts, rather than duplicating them. Based on these discussions, one of the first tasks of the group, which voted on the name *Healthy Southeast Raleigh*, was to develop priority focus areas for the coming years.

The group agreed on the following interconnected priorities:



## Putting Plans Into Action

Healthy Southeast Raleigh's original priorities ultimately led to the following overarching themes in the county:

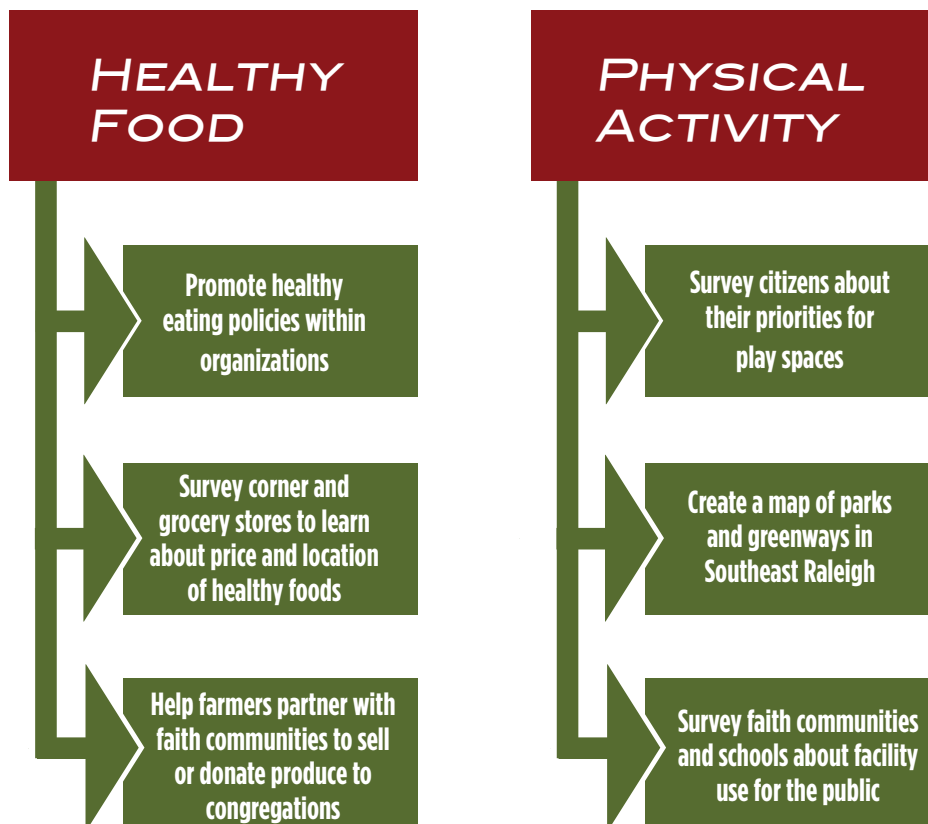
- Promoting grassroots community engagement, including community appreciation, connecting the community with resources, and engaging with faith communities;
- Opening up faith communities' and schools' recreational spaces for public use; and
- Increasing food access.



Representative Holley speaks to the group about food deserts and her work to promote food access.

For each priority area, Healthy Southeast Raleigh members developed an extensive list of specific goals that they wanted to accom-

plish over the coming years. A sample of these goals is displayed in the figure below.



Healthy Southeast Raleigh and the VIA team have made significant progress towards achieving their goals. Among its early successes, Healthy Southeast Raleigh formed a partnership with the local YMCA's REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) team to develop facility use agreements with Southeast Raleigh faith communities, developed maps showing locations of food and physical activity resources, and published a Health and Wellness Resource Guide that was launched at a community event on April 5, 2013, designed to connect the community to existing resources.

Over 20 organizations participated in the Southeast Raleigh Health and Wellness Resource Day, offering information about their services and programs to numerous residents who came to learn about food, nutrition, and physical activity programs in the area. Two guest speakers, NC General Assembly Representative Yvonne Holley and Raleigh City Councilman Eugene Weeks, gave inspirational speeches about community building, health, and food access. The event also included two panel sessions – one with mini-grantees who spoke about their funded projects, and one with faith community representatives talking about their health and wellness ministry efforts – and a dance fitness session sponsored by Southeast Raleigh Assembly, Inc. (SERA).

The following action items are also currently in progress:

► **Encouraging Facility Use Agreements:** In partnership with the REACH Team, Healthy Southeast Raleigh is working on identifying churches that are interested in opening their facilities for public recreational use.

► **Engaging with Faith Communities:** Group members are building relationships with various faith communities and facilitating collaborations among several churches' health and wellness ministries. The group would like to link faith communities to existing community resources, particularly related to health education through programs like Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More.

► **Increasing Food Access:** Healthy Southeast Raleigh has been brainstorming the best ways to increase access to food in the community. One of the most important strategies that they have identified is to develop collaborative efforts and support existing organizations with a similar focus on food access, such as Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, the Fertile Ground Food Cooperative planning group, Grocers on Wheels mobile market, and Oak City Outreach Center. Healthy Southeast Raleigh also plans to move forward with piloting a healthy corner store initiative to lower costs and increase availability of healthy foods in smaller stores.

This group is continually working hard to build community capacity and link with existing programs and resources to reach their goals. Community buy-in and support is key to continuing with our grassroots initiatives and working from the ground up to make positive changes.

Healthy Southeast Raleigh is a group of passionate community partners. We are excited to continue to work with this group in the future, to build on successes, and develop new visions for the Southeast Raleigh community.

## COMMUNITIES IN ACTION: VIA MINI-GRANTS

In order to facilitate community-led action, in 2014 we awarded mini-grants to ten Southeast Raleigh organizations with creative proposals for improving access to healthy and affordable food and safe places to be active in their communities. Our goal was that these mini-grant projects would serve as springboards for long-lasting, sustainable changes.

The main criteria for the grants, which were developed in partnership with community stakeholders, were that each project must:

- Include a policy and/or environmental change;
- Improve access to healthy foods and/or safe places to be active;
- Involve work with partners; and
- Include a plan for long-term sustainability.

Alliance Medical  
Ministry Community  
Garden.



“Alliance Medical Ministry takes a holistic approach to wellness through healthy food access and education for its patients. The Voices into Action mini-grant is allowing Alliance to expand its community garden, and therefore helping Alliance patients get healthy.”

~ Alliance Medical Ministry  
project leader

The maximum budget for a grant was \$2,000, with some exceptions made depending on the scope of the proposed project.

Our first round of mini-grants was awarded in January 2014, after being reviewed by VIA staff, community mentors, and members of Healthy Southeast Raleigh, as well as by the USDA. The following organizations and individuals were awarded mini-grants:

- **Agape Word Fellowship Church:** to provide free fitness classes at the church for both church members and the general public;
- **Alice Aycock Poe Center:** to create a hands-on learning garden where youth, their families, and community members can learn about gardening and healthy eating, and to donate produce from the garden to Passage Home;
- **Alliance Medical Ministry:** to enhance an existing community garden to provide fresh produce for clients and the general public, in addition to hosting EFNEP classes;

- **Fertile Ground Food Cooperative:** to hire a consultant who will conduct a community assessment and provide recommendations for establishing a food cooperative;
- **Grocers on Wheels (a mobile produce market):** to allow the market to run year-round and expand its reach within Southeast Raleigh by providing a cooler to keep produce fresh;
- **Neighbor to Neighbor Outreach:** to provide a safe place for youth to be active by building a permanent skateboard park and providing safety equipment for youth skaters;
- **North Carolina Fair Share CDC:** to create a large urban outdoor garden, as well as an indoor hydroponic gardening system, where youth and community members will learn about sustainable agriculture;

“Treasuring Christ Church is so excited to be able to offer a playground for our surrounding community to use. Martha, a member of TCC as well as a resident of Southeast Raleigh, is thankful that the TCC playground provides a great, safe place for her children to play near her home.”

~ Treasuring Christ Church project leader

- **Passage Home:** to incorporate physical fitness classes at youth summer camps, provide healthy meals at camps and organizational meetings, and host EFNEP classes for community members;

“We are very excited to be part of such a revolutionary project! It will give our community the opportunity to create and control a means of food development but will also address the issue of gentrification that is happening in SE Raleigh. Control the food, control the land!”

~ NC Fair Share CDC project leader

- **Treasuring Christ Church:** to enhance an existing playground on their property to provide children in the community with a safe place to be active; and
- **Wake County Cooperative Extension:** to implement the Farm it Forward program, which teaches families how to prepare healthy meals on a budget, using fresh, local produce, at Mount Peace Baptist Church.

Working with Healthy Southeast Raleigh, our goal is to continue working with these organizations and to connect them with local resources to create sustainable, long-term changes that will help improve access to food and places to be active for children and their families.



Grocers on Wheels at Chavis Park in Southeast Raleigh.

## *MOVING FORWARD: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?*

Given all that we have learned by listening to community voices, surveying the community environment, and putting priorities into action: Where do we go from here? As aforementioned, the ACTION of the project continues. Healthy Southeast Raleigh is still hard at work on reaching the goals of their action plan, with a renewed focus on faith communities, food access, and supporting families. Our partnership with EFNEP continues to expand, and Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More classes have carried over into 2014. Additionally, the 2014 mini-grant projects are just getting started, and we are excited to see where these innovative projects lead. We are also about to start another round of conversations with the same mothers and grandmothers we spoke with during the first year of our project, to hear how their VOICES and visions for their communities have changed.

Community-based work like this is always an ongoing process. As community members and organizations take ACTION, more VOICES are added to the mix in order to learn about new priorities and new directions to take. As our work continues in Southeast Raleigh, we will continue to focus on the themes identified by our community partners and community residents: healthy eating, access to healthy foods and produce, faith communities as partners, and food security. We will continue listening to community residents and organizations and collaborating on ways to improve access to healthy food and places to be active in Southeast Raleigh. We hope you will join us!

**We hope you  
will join us!**







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