Building Movement Project • Detroit Black Community Food Security Network • People's Kitchen Detroit • Freedom Freedom Growers • MSUE - Health and Nutrition Institute • Just Creative • Creative Community Pathways • East Michigan Environmental Action Council

Building Movement– Detroit (BMP)
Linda Stewart-Campbell, Co-PD

Creative Community Pathways (CCP)
Phyllis Davis-Williams, Co-PD

Detroit Black Community
Food Security Network (DBCFSN)
Hanifa Adjuman, Ed. Coordinator

East Michigan Environmental Action Council
(EMEAC)
Darryl E. Jordan, Co-PD

Feedom Freedom Growers (FFG)
Myrtle Thompson-Curtis, Co-PD

Just Creative, LLC (JC)
Lottie Spady & Susana Adamé-Goff, Co-PDs

People's Kitchen Detroit (PKD)
Angela Newsom, Co-PD

Five Years of CHIRP: The Big Lessons

Participatory Action Research and the Child Health Incubator Research Project: Creating a transformational community.

CHIRP Research Team: Michigan State University Extension, Health and Nutrition Institute

K.E. Vachta, PhD: PI/PD; M. Kweli, MPA: Project Manager; C. Danley, Project Coordinator
T. Petty & R. M. Jones: Project Assistants; J. Kautz, MA, Dissemination Coach.

Partners/Co-PDs

L. S. Campbell, Building Movement Project; P. Davis-Williams, Creative Community Pathways; M. Yakini & H. Adjuman, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network; D. Jordan, East Michigan Environmental Action Council; M. Thompson-Curtis, Feedom Freedom Growers; L. Spady & S. Adamé-Goff, Just Creative; A. Newsom, People's Kitchen Detroit

PROJECT GOAL:

Creating a learning community among grass roots and community-based organizations in Detroit to develop evidence-based childhood obesity prevention programming using a shared "food justice" lens.

METHODS:

Participatory Action Research (PAR): grounded research, participant observation, qualitative interviews, analysis of archival data/documents, critical self-reflection and formative evaluation.

"PAR is

- participatory;
- cooperative, engaging community members and researchers in a joint process in which both contribute equally;
- a co-learning process for researchers and community members;
- a method for systems development and local community capacity building;
- an empowering process through which participants can increase control over their lives by nurturing community strengths and problem-solving abilities; and a way to balance research and action." - Minkler (2000)

As we complete our fifth year, this poster provides a summary of key findings of the CHIRP project to-date, including:

A report on our Process Evaluation:
How CHIRP evolved from collaboration to partnership to community.

A report on our Impact Assessment:
How to effectively create a context that promotes and supports a healthy lifestyle and environment for Detroit children based on the work of the CHIRP partner organizations.

In this case, the results are intertwined - CHIRP evolved as the partners and research team made discoveries about how best to meet the needs and interests of participating families and impact the health and well-being of Detroit children.

While communities across the nation struggle with preventing childhood obesity and with finding effective methods to promote healthful lifestyles for young children, these challenges are amplified in communities where many of the resources typically promoted as 'solutions' are missing, may exist in unusual forms and places, or many residents are unaware and unfamiliar with them. We cannot admonish parents to "feed their children the rainbow" when the only produce at the nearby corner store is a furry lemon and there is no reliable public transportation available to reach larger grocery stores. In Detroit, the Child Health Incubator Research Project (CHIRP) has been working since 2011 to bring community partners and residents together to create innovative resources and opportunities that address these important concerns. While some of the programs may look similar to what you might find anywhere, in addition to cooking and nutrition classes, food tastings and family fitness opportunities, the pursuit of health and food justice underlies the work of all of the community partners. For example, Detroit's burgeoning urban agriculture movement may belie its status as a "food desert," but many residents are still unaware of those locally available resources. Some may know about a nearby produce stand but don't know how to prepare the available produce and the media we are exposed to implies that it's not necessary anyway. In this era of Detroit's supposed "renaissance", there are increasing conflicts over land and water use that can make urban farming as a strategy for self-sufficiency even more difficult. In this context, the justice issues relating to land tenure, access and affordability may be as critical to creating a health-promoting environment for Detroit's children as the typical questions about information, acceptance, and exposure/taste. In order to address that confluence of circumstances to make real change, we have learned that…

"It's all about relationships. About building a web of resources and people surrounding them who they know and are comfortable calling on for anything they may need" -Phyllis Davis-Williams, CCP Co-PD

Year 1: Building and expanding relationships among CHIRP partners

CHIRP was initially designed to be a learning community. Partners would gather once per month to share experiences, resources and information and to help one another troubleshoot any challenges. The original intent was to create a network of communication and support while minimizing the extent to which involvement in CHIRP diverted the partners from their community work. Our 2012 poster focused on forming the learning community, the process of building relationships between partners and creating programming that addressed the needs and interests of the families the partners serve.

Year 2-3: Relationships based on reciprocity among partners and participants

Many of the partners quickly realized that, given their diversity in expertise, they could draw on one another to close gaps in their own programming, expand their reach and enhance the impact of their work. They offered workshops for one another's program participants, encouraged participants to attend one another's activities and took field trips to each other's program sites. This increasing collaboration was highlighted in our poster in 2013. Our 2014 poster highlighted the lessons from those collaborative efforts that apply to both community-based programming and community-engaged research such as recognizing that change is a reciprocal process (not something "we" do to "them"!) and respecting the lived expertise, values and priorities of residents/participants.

Years 4: Establishing relationships beyond CHIRP for long term sustainability

In order to sustain their efforts and impact during the year-long gap in funding as we transitioned to a new host university (examined in our 2015 poster), the CHIRP partners co-created programming and worked with non-CHIRP groups to share their knowledge and resources with a broader network of people and groups. In the process, we discovered that programs that were facilitated by multiple partners can draw in and help build supportive relationships among parents and families across their varying constituencies and enhance their grasp of the relationships between the areas of focus of each CHIRP partner (for example, between land use policy and urban farming or media and nutrition education). By building this extended network of mutually supportive organizations offering shared programming and resources, the partners also began to build a foundation for sustainability of the work beyond the current grant.

Year 5: Creating a web relationships to support a healthy Detroit community

Over the years, CHIRP has become part of a community of Detroit families supporting one another in the effort to create a healthy environment for Detroit's children. Young people and their families are immersed in a community that values them and their choices, shares resources and information and works for a healthy and sustainable Detroit. There are regular events such as Food Justice Friday where Detroiters gather for a healthy meal, art, music and discussion about the current challenges to maintaining a self-sufficient, healthy lifestyle in our city such as land use conflicts and water rights. While it can be hard to make unfashionable choices, this community creates a space where advocating for local food sovereignty, growing produce, creating healthful meals that highlight culturally traditional foods, critiquing popular media and creating a new community food narrative has been normalized for these children. They and their families have a web of relationships to draw on to ensure their success.

A participant in JC's "Youth Media" helping a "Little" from EMEAC's "Greener Schools" create a healthy salad with vegetables she chose herself.

Participants in these programs have demonstrated that sometimes the best way to encourage children to make healthy choices is for adults to learn from young people. For example, JC learned that, "***Sometimes it seems like parents and their assumptions are the biggest impediment to eating healthy!***" As one Youth Media participant explained, if instead of assuming a child won't like vegetables, "*…your mom's like 'Oh! I made some carrots today…' … and 'if you want to you can try it', you can be like, 'ok well mom's being nice and the food is really delicious so I might just try it with the carrots!' So it's just like a positive and negative connotation to what you're doing. They just need to be smarter about how they cook things and push things."*

BMP continues to offer leadership and policy education programming for the staff and patrons of the network of client choice emergency food pantries that they helped to create. They enlisted PKD to offer monthly cooking classes for pantry patrons who are interested in creating healthful meals from the pantry offerings. In turn, the classes also help draw new members into the pantry. Participants at one of the pantries so appreciated the opportunity to spend time with neighbors who shared their interests in creating a healthy lifestyle for their children that they requested a second meeting each month to deepen their knowledge and their relationships, "*the women there that attend the class were really interested in having a space where they could sit down together and share and look up information and maybe have speakers come in about different topics.*"

CHIRP beyond Detroit! DBCFSN's Food Warriors are joined by Slow Food International Vice President, Edie Mukibi from Uganda. He is the architect of the Slow Food 10,000 Gardens in Africa campaign. (Slow Food USA Executive Director, Richard McCarthy, also participated in the visit.)

Children whose families participate in many different CHIRP programs stretching in preparation for a day of fitness and fun in FFGs garden during the CHIRP 2015-2016 Kick Off in October, 2015.

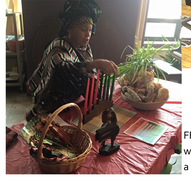
Taking a breather from the day's fun!

A recent Food Justice Friday where CHIRP participants and families from across the city gather to share an evening of art, music and fun over a healthy meal and discuss important issues facing our neighborhoods. The event was hosted at the Cass Corridor Commons which is run by EMEAC. PKD created the recipes and coordinated volunteers from several organizations to prepare the food. JC joined PKD in talking about food justice and coordinating the open mic/arts programming. Everyone brought participants - who often brought other family members and neighbors. This is what a healthy community for Detroit's children looks like!

THE CHIRP RESEARCH TEAM at the 2015-16 CHIRP Kick Off!

Pictured from Left to Right:
Makini Kweli, Project Manager; Tawana Petty, Project Assistant; Cheryl Danley, Project Coordinator; Roxanne Moore-Jones, Project Assistant and Jennifer Kautz, Dissemination Coach.
With Hanifa Adjuman, Education-Outreach Director and Food Warriors Coordinator (DBCFSN).
Not pictured: Erin Shawgo, Project Assistant, who joined the CRT in Spring 2016.

Guest Chefs of Saginaw Chippewa Tribe help EMEAC's "Kids in the Kitchen" learn about Michigan's indigenous cultures and foods to celebrate the harvest season and a healthier Thanksgiving.



FFG shares holiday traditions and recipes with EMEAC's Ready 2 Grow members for a healthy Kwanzaa

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