



Community *works*

January 2016

Partnering for a Sustainable Community

UPDATE

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The Surplus Project

The Concern:

Food insecurity – the lack of access to enough food for an active, healthy life – affects 1 out of 5 families with children in Cook County. Even in relatively affluent communities like Oak Park and River Forest, the food insecurity rate is over 12%. While many in our community struggle to obtain sufficient nutritious food to feed their families, an estimated 25-40% of all food grown, processed, and transported in the United States is never consumed but goes to a landfill. There, food rots creating methane, a potent greenhouse gas with 21 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Too much hunger, too much food, too much waste.



Michele Zurakowski
OPRF Food Pantry Director

The Community Leadership Program Steps Up

The idea for The Surplus Project arose during a discussion of what kind of community impact project members of last year's Community Leadership Program (CLP) could develop, support and sustain. Jennifer Greiner was one of the CLP participants. She is a registered nurse and director of the Telemetry and Resource Team at Rush Oak Park Hospital. She has spearheaded many initiatives, including the creation of a daily report card for patients and families outlining the treatment plan and providing needed education. Her CLP Team members included Beth Klein from the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry; Jennifer Gawlik, a social worker with Thrive Counseling Center; Tod Altenburg, the Chief School Business Official at OPRF High School; and Joy Wright from the Oak Park River Forest Day Nursery. Klein's role in the program is coordination of food delivery at the Food Pantry. Altenburg worked on the finances. Wright handled the communications, and Gawlik reached out to West Suburban and MacNeal hospitals as potential partners in the program. The team identified food insecurity as the target issue they would address in their course project.

A Solution that Benefits the Community

Fast forward to the Spring of 2015. By then the Community Leadership Program team had established an ongoing relationship with the Food Pantry and Rush Oak Park Hospital. These two organizations engaged in an innovative way to reduce commercial food waste and increase the amount of safe, nutritious food for those in our community who struggle with hunger.

The Food Pantry's Director, Michele Zurakowski tells us, "The Food Pantry rescues 350 nutritious meals each month from the hospital's cafeteria to distribute to Food Pantry clients. Because our current location limits the capacity for food distribution, we are in discussions with other agencies whose food-insecure clients could use such ready-made meals, including parochial schools, and a pediatric clinic for low-income families."

In June the Food Pantry began partnering with West Cook YMCA to provide their residents with some of these surplus meals. The collaboration started with one delivery per week to the Y and we are now scaling that to twice a week.

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Success of ALL Youth

COMMUNITY CARE FROM CRADLE TO CAREER

Creating Effective Strategies

After conversations and careful deliberation with those in the community, the SAY steering committee has put forth two main themes for SAY working groups. The aim is to create effective strategies.

The first theme is **mentorship of our youth**. Feedback from the SAY Steering Committee revealed that we were missing the intentional connection of youth with caring adults in the community.

Through many different types of mentorship relationships, youth can benefit greatly from having a range of experiences, ranging in intensity and length. An added advantage is that children know that they are cared for and have caring adults upon whom they can rely.

SAY intends to convene working groups that will:

- Assess existing mentoring programs
- Evaluate the need for mentoring, using existing qualitative and quantitative data, to determine gaps, and make suggestions for improvements
- Determine how we will measure the effectiveness of our programing and community efforts
- Promote informal mentoring in the community through a mentorship campaign, information, and training

The second theme focuses on **executive functioning skills**. These allow people to manage tasks from beginning to end. It includes tasks such as planning, organization, memory, time management and flexibility. Proficiency becomes increasingly more complex as children/youth progress through school and career. OPRFHS has implemented several interventions, but challenges in this area are often unknown to parents. This lends itself to a student population with varying levels of capability in this area.

With a focus on asset building and prevention SAY plans to convene working groups that will:

Hearing It Directly

Success of ALL Youth (SAY) is pleased to introduce its first SAY Youth Board. Following an appointment process that included an online application and a group interview session – reviewing more than 30 applicants – the final board includes a total of 16 participants. They range in age from 6th through 12th grade, and represent 6 different schools in the Oak Park and River Forest community.

We asked SAY Director Linda Francis, “Why does SAY need a Youth Board? What do we expect from it?”

In response she said: “If Oak Park and River Forest are to be communities that meet the diverse needs of all of their youth, then it is imperative that we hear directly from the youth what they believe are their needs. In addition, self-efficacy is an important skill needed for success in all areas of life. Participants and community youth will be encouraged to participate in designing and implementing improvements and solutions that empower all youth to reach their full potential.”

The SAY Youth Board convened its first official meeting on Friday, December 4th to introduce board members to one another and frame out its purpose. Board members will be developing the required skills to help them gather information from their peers, represent them in decision making at the community level, and mobilize them for support when needed.

This board will serve from December through June. A new board is proposed to be placed for the 2016-17 cycle, which will run from July 2016 - June 2017.

The application process for the next board will be determined by the young people serving on the first SAY Youth board.

- Gather information on the scope of executive functioning challenges, as well as current available resources
- Facilitate the development of a plan for how to improve supports and interventions from cradle to career
- Determine how we will measure the effectiveness of our school and community efforts
- Promote parental and community supports through a parent network and our partners

SAY continues to build on the collective impact model, engaging more community partners to come together under a common agenda, to drive work with evidence-based decision making and to evaluate the work using continuous improvement.

View the YouTube video [“InBrief: Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning”](#) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University



PlanItGreen

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Green Guides

Knowing which waste items can go into the recycle or compost bin doesn't come naturally. We could all live a lot greener if we just knew where to get the proper waste reduction information and tips.

PlanItGreen intends to make that happen with a new initiative it's launching in early 2016. A communications network, Green Guides, will facilitate neighbors helping neighbors build a more resilient community.

"Green Guides are residents who will communicate with their neighbors, to point them in the right direction for resources on waste reduction, water conservation, energy efficiency and more," says Jen Nelson, Zero Waste program manager for Seven Generations Ahead. "We are not expecting Green Guides to be experts in any or all areas. They will simply be links, connecting their neighbors to green resources in our communities."

"It can be confusing to know what can be recycled and what can be composted," Jen says. "Our goal is to make it easier for residents to participate in these programs."

Green Community Connections (GCC) is organizing the Green Guides, who will be "sustainable knowledge resources," says Sally Stovall. A recruitment effort is on to sign up the Volunteer Guides, who will be responsible for their block or a neighborhood-wide area.

Green Guides will spend a couple of hours a month chatting or emailing with their neighbors and connecting them with the information and resources they need to be more sustainable, Sally says. They "will occasionally get together to share stories and successes."

Through Green Guides, residents can get clarity and answers about waste reduction.

The Guides will share tips and resources. They will communicate with their neighbors through email, and in some cases, knock on doors, Sally says. A Green Guides kickoff event is planned for some time in January, she adds. Details will be announced soon.

PlanItGreen also is making an educational guide to hang on refrigerators, which illustrates what can be composted, recycled, or as a last resort, sent to landfill. Green Guides will distribute this information to their respective blocks.

Oak Park and River Forest residents interested in being a Green Guide can sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/nkz89ut>.

[Article excerpted from <http://tinyurl.com/zg3qdxp>].

Institutional Leaders Share Progress

PlanItGreen's Fourth Annual Institutional Leaders Forum on Nov. 12 brought more than 40 institutional leaders together to share local sustainability efforts. Each provided snapshots of what their organizations and agencies have done in the last year to help Oak Park and River Forest become more resilient communities.

Some shared snapshots:

- Adrian Fisher, Triton College's Sustainability coordinator, highlighted the new Bike to Campus Coalition and environmental science program.
- Julie Moller, a member of the River Forest Sustainability Committee, reported on the annual Recycling Extravaganza, which has helped divert 160,000 pounds of electronics in the last four years.
- Ron Burke, executive director of the Active Transportation Alliance, projected that Oak Park's updated bike plan "will have a lot more people biking."
- Cheney Mansion Garden and food collaboration (Concordia, Sugar Beet Food Co-op, Park District of Oak Park): 800 pounds of food harvested and donated to the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry.
- Rush Oak Park Food Scrap Composting: 41 tons of food scraps diverted from landfills.
- Village of Oak Park Water Conservation Plan: Instituted code revisions, village-wide leak detection; tightened irrigation hours; upgraded water meters, and distributed 5-minute shower timers.
- D97 Hatch (School) Patch: Student garden yielded more than 400 pounds of fresh vegetables.
- The Surplus Project: Collaboration between Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry and Rush that delivers surplus hospital meals to pantry clients. The Surplus Project was designed and developed by a team of students in the Community Leadership Program at Dominican University in partnership with *Communityworks*.



Water Conservation Lunch and Learn

PlanItGreen's Lunch and Learn event, "Rainwater Harvesting and Greywater Reuse Systems for Buildings" on October 14 brought more than a dozen representatives of various local organizations and businesses to hear John Bauer, President of Wahaso-Water Harvesting Solutions explain how water can be reused efficiently. His presentation is available for viewing at: http://prezi.com/ayunybhmkqnj/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy



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The Surplus Project – *continued from page 1*

Rush Oak Park Hospital employees volunteering with the Surplus Project all have received the food handler certifications that state and federal laws require for people to repackage prepared foods into individual servings. As a partner in The Surplus Project, Rush Oak Park Hospital demonstrates another way it is dedicated to building a healthier community around us.

From an idea to a sustainable approach to reducing food insecurity in less than one year, thanks to the collaboration that *Communityworks* engenders through the Community Leadership Program. <http://business.dom.edu/academics/community-leadership-program>

Matt Baron, President of the Oak Park Public Library Board, observed when asked about the partnership built out of The Community Leadership Project, “This is fantastic – what a great example of the good that comes out of asking questions until we come up with solutions. The Community Leadership Program perennially is a breeding ground for good!”

Current 2015-2016 Community Leadership Participants

Community Leadership PROGRAM

Michael Arensdorff
Oak Park District 97, Director of Technology

Kamil Brady
Wednesday Journal, Sales and Marketing Coordinator

Natalie Caver
Electronic Transactions Consultants, BusinessSystems Analyst

Sally Cody
Village of Forest Park, Executive Assistant to the Mayor

Pleshette Davis
OPRF Food Pantry, Benefits Coordinator

Gina Donlin
Hephzibah Children’s Association, Special Events and Communications Managers

Dewey Gosnell
Rush Oak Park Hospital, Director of Information Technology

Melissa Gudino-Kelly
Forest Park National Bank, Vice President, Commercial Lending

Liz Holt
Heritage Tile, Manager of Education and Outreach

Lindsay Johnson
River Forest District 90, Technology Integration Specialist

Megan Lewis
Kittleman and Associates, Senior Associate

Bobby Lockett
Community Bank of OPRF, Personal Banker

Christina Martin
The Children’s School, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Jennifer Nelson
Seven Generations Ahead, Program Manager

Ervin Perez
Dominican University, Manager of Office Services

Michelle Ptack
OPRF Community Foundation, Development Associate

Mary Ann Tobin
Triton College, Director of Teaching and Learning