

# Appendix C: Focus Groups

To supplement the digital and paper surveys of the Centers for New Horizon Food Access Survey, the project team convened three community focus groups. Each focus group was representative of a prominent demographic within the Greater Bronzeville community.

Led by the Centers for New Horizons (CNH) staff, 17 residents were recruited to share in detail their experience with food access in the greater Bronzeville community. Focus groups were held at a variety of community locations, utilizing a survey tool created by Dr. Daniel Block from Chicago State University that mirrored the food access survey distributed throughout the community. CMAP staff, with the assistance of CNH, administered and recorded each of the focus groups.

## Seniors Focus Group

On Thursday, June 5, 2013, CMAP and CNH staff convened a senior focus group at Legends South Hansberry Center (4016 South State Street). The group consisted of nine seniors, all African American females, who are part of a weekly senior meeting group. While there wasn't much diversity in the demographics of the group, each participant was able to provide a detailed account of their experience with food access as well as a general overview of how seniors in the Legends South housing complex dealt with food access.

The number one issue voiced by senior focus group participants was lack of quick and reliable transportation services to reach quality food and/or grocery establishments. Participants talked about 2 to 3 hour door to door trips because of the infrequency of buses, slow travel of buses along major corridors and the need to often visit multiple stores during an outing that are not in close proximity of each other. Participants identified 12<sup>th</sup> and Wabash, 47<sup>th</sup> and Halstead, 63<sup>rd</sup> and Halstead and 87<sup>th</sup> and Stony Island as the main intersections they were traveling to, by bus, to complete their shopping.

Another issue expressed during the group was the lack of a quality, affordable store within a reasonable distance to senior residents in Bronzeville. Participants mentioned a proposed grocery store at 39<sup>th</sup> and State that has been in the works for almost 7 years to no avail. Participants were encouraged when CMAP and CNH staff informed them of the Walmart under construction at 47<sup>th</sup> and Cottage Grove, "It's about time we have something here, that will be nice for us", and voiced that they would like to see similar projects underway. "The Trader Joe's at Wabash and Roosevelt is very nice, I wonder if we could have something like that here", one participant voiced with overwhelming support from the group.

Participants not only discussed food access and transportation, but also food quality, or lack thereof in the community. Many of the shopping trips for group participants includes quick



trips to corner stores for everyday necessities, like meat, eggs and bread. Participants noted that selection at local corner stores "...is very rarely of good quality. Items [meats, dairy, eggs, vegetables] are often spoiled, past their expiration date or have issues with the packaging, like holes". This not only makes it a necessity for seniors in the focus group to travel long distances for a small amount of daily groceries, it also forces them to incur high costs by travelling to larger grocery chains in surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition to the above issues, participants also discussed their limited financial means to purchase healthy food options for their families. All nine senior participants received some type of food subsidy and are responsible for feeding more than just themselves; some receive as little as six dollars per month. One participant cited almost 2000 seniors and countless families residing in Bronzville face the same financial challenges. One participant simply stated, "healthy food cost a lot of money", most participants agreed and indicated they often had to make a choice between healthy or cheaper options with less nutritional value due to cost.

With all the valuable feedback that was received on food challenges, participants did point out a few bright spots in the community. Numerous community gardens and farmers markets were mentioned ( St. James pantry, 45<sup>th</sup> and Cottage Grove, 51<sup>st</sup> and Cottage Grove, 75<sup>th</sup> and State Street were provided as examples). When asked about other options such as Fresh Moves, a grassroots mobile produce market, or Peapod grocery delivery services, participants stated that Peapod as recently as one year ago was not available in their community and Fresh Moves, was often too high of a price for not the best quality.

The session was concluded by asking participants what they would like to see in their community in the near future. There was overwhelming consensus that the community needed a drug store for basic essentials, a Currency Exchange, multiple sit down restaurant establishments, expansion of grocery drop off service (outside of small community stores, individuals will provide rides to shoppers with lots of bags to alleviate them having to use the bus, small businesses to fill the multiple vacant buildings in the community and security to patrol all new and existing businesses to ensure residents have a safe shopping experience in their community.

## **Public Housing Residents Focus Group**

On Thursday, June 13, 2013, CMAP and CNH staff meet with the second focus group, consisting of three African American female clients of the Centers for New Horizons with low to moderate incomes. Each of the participants was head of household for a young family (multiple children under age 15). In total, the participants were responsible for providing food for 11 children and 5 adults (including themselves). The focus group utilized the same survey instrument as the senior focus group.

This focus group cited many of the same issues as the senior group in terms of using public transportation for food shopping, however, instead of lengthy bus trips, members of the focus



group overwhelmingly relied on friends and family to carpool to grocery stores outside of the community. Participants cited traveling to the north and west side neighborhoods of Chicago for better quality food and better prices than could be found in the Bronzeville community. The only issue expressed by participants was a language barrier when traveling to west side stores in largely Hispanic neighborhoods.

Participants noted that they did visit local food establishments for small food purchases (1 or 2 items) but felt they generally overpaid for items whether shopping at a corner store or a large retail grocer in the community. One service participants were not utilizing was local farmers markets and community gardens. Participants acknowledged seeing markets throughout the community, but very rarely considered them an option. There was a preference to buy food from a traditional grocery store and/or food establishment.

All participants again received some form of food subsidy, all noting that their allowance was not enough to cover the households food expenses for each month. Participants noted that it is helpful that their childrens' schools provided breakfast and lunch options, however, they questioned the health and nutrition of the foods they were being served. They also noted that their children often times do not like or do not finish school provided snacks and meals and they must supplement those meals on their own (either by packing additional snacks for school and/or making larger dinners to accommodate a missed lunch).

The focus group again concluded by asking participants what they would like to see in the community. Participants responded with: more and better quality sit down restaurants, an Aldi market, better customer service from community stores and for their money to go further when buying food in the community.

## Homeowners Focus Group

The final focus group also met on Thursday, June 13, 2013, at Centers for New Horizons. The group consisted of five homeowners (4 African American males and 1 African American female) who currently live in the Greater Bronzeville Community. The focus group utilized the same survey tool as the previous two focus groups.

This focus group differed from the previous two in that the group focused much more on the overall healthy and development of the Bronzeville community, only slightly touching on food access issues and preferences.

Participants noted that rather than public transportation, most residents utilized carpooling or car sharing, such as Zip Car or I-Go, services when completing food shopping in the community. Participants favored stores in the surrounding neighborhoods rather than those directly in Bronzeville but for quick purchases (1 or 2 items) would visit local establishments. Farmers markets were also utilized more by this group, but it was noted that prices tended to be on the high side, so not everything is able to be purchased from these markets.



One note of interest was the financial constraints of this group. Many cited the down turn of the economy (loss of jobs, high mortgages etc.) as a barrier to their food budgets. One participant stated, “It’s important to note, that you have medical students, graduate students, a number of new professionals utilizing LINK cards, because they simply cannot afford food. This is a different demographic than people would assume”. In addition to financial constraints, the group also mentioned time restraints. Participants preferred to get shopping done during destination shopping trips (trips where they were able to visit and make purchases at other retailers-clothing, banking, coffee etc.) to save time and transportation resources. Participants expressed this was difficult to accomplish this in the Bronzeville community.

The group spent a majority of the time talking about neighborhood changes and development opportunities that could address not only food access issues but overall quality of life issues. Participants spoke of the changing ethnic and cultural demographics of Bronzeville and how this should entice new retailers to the community. The abundance of vacant property and land was mentioned as a prime opportunity for new business development (both large and small in size). Increased urban agriculture and community gardening were mentioned as an opportunity for youth employment and training opportunities. Participants also spoke of the necessity of changing community perception and negative stereotypes as a way to attract new business.

There were also questions of how new development will change the shopping culture of the community. The main topic of concern was the new Walmart under construction at 47<sup>th</sup> and Cottage Grove. While participants were excited to see development there were concerns on how this particular development would affect surrounding smaller or non-competitively priced establishments, creating additional vacant space in the community. Participants also stressed the necessity for small business and entrepreneurship development in addition to “big box” or large retail development.

## Conclusion

Overall participants provided similar feedback as those that completed the online and paper survey options. Participants were very open and willing to express their thoughts on food access in their communities. All focus group participants expressed interest in additional opportunities to be involved in this and future studies through CNH.

For future projects, larger and more diverse (in terms of gender and age) participation will only expand the range of opinions and responses. However, based on these focus groups, CNH has a strong baseline of information to move forward in their future food access work.

