

Spotlight on the Safety Net

*A Community Collaboration
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Mobile Clinic Market Project

In these tough economic times, finding new ways to use existing resources is a great way to help meet needs. A new partnership in North Carolina between the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle (IFFS), the North Carolina Community Health Center Association, the North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs, and the North Carolina Office of Rural Health and Community Care is creating mobile farmers markets at community health centers and rural health clinics for patients with chronic diseases.

The project began through a great example of community collaboration. Susan Yaggy, president and chief executive officer of the North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs, had previously worked with the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle while in another job. She and David Reese, chief operation officer of food recovery and distribution for IFFS, served as co-chairs on a task force on obesity and chronic disease. Discussions revealed that IFFS needed more locations to deliver food to in rural areas. Following these discussions, Ms. Yaggy convened representatives from the North Carolina Community Health Center Association and the Office of Rural Health and Community Care to meet with Mr. Reese to learn more about IFFS and clinic-based fresh food and vegetable delivery. The group continued meeting to discuss the feasibility of IFFS delivering food to community health centers and rural health clinics. The project would not require any additional funding and could provide people with chronic diseases access to healthy foods—making a connection between fresh fruit and vegetables and medical care.

Inter-Faith Food Shuttle is one of seven Feeding America foodbanks in North Carolina. The Inter-Faith Food Shuttle has been serving the greater Triangle area since 1989. There are more than 165,000 people living in poverty in the seven county service area—putting them at high risk for food insecurity. When a person does not know where or how they will receive three meals a day, 365 days a year, they are considered to be food insecure. IFFS is committed to recovering perishable food, keeping good food out of landfills, and keeping people from food insecurity. The staff recovers products from places like the state farmers market, grocery stores, local farms, and other organizations with food that consumers have not purchased. From its humble beginning recovering unsold breakfast sandwiches, IFFS has grown from recovering 600 pounds of food to more than 6 million pounds of wholesome and nutritious food annually. In addition to food rescue and distribution, the IFFS also operates a culinary job training program, catering service, farms and community gardens, children's nutrition programs, and nutrition and cooking classes focused on affordable, healthy meals. During the school year, IFFS also provides backpacks with six meals and two healthy snacks for children from food insecure homes to eat on weekends.

Another component of the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle is the mobile farmers' market project, a well-established program that addresses access barriers (e.g., price, transportation, and knowledge of resources) to nutritious, affordable food by offering recovered food to low-income neighborhoods. The food is arranged as an open farmers' market and offered to individuals at no cost. IFFS hosted more than 40 of these mobile farmers' markets in the greater Triangle area during the past five years. The mobile farmers' market projects are designed to re-create the farmers' market experience in low-income communities.

The partnership with community health centers and rural health clinics has helped focus on appropriate nutrition for people with chronic diseases. The process is a bit different than the mobile farmers' markets that are usually hosted at senior centers and other neighborhood resource centers. At the mobile clinic markets, health care providers identify patients who have nutritional needs that may help improve their

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medical conditions. Patients are then given a voucher from the clinic to redeem at the mobile clinic market, which may be located in the parking lot or adjoining facility, at no cost to them.

In November 2009, the first mobile clinic market was opened at the Benson Area Medical Center, a rural health center in Benson, in partnership with Tri-County Community Health Center in Newton Grove, North Carolina. The collaboration between the different organizations broke down barriers to healthy, nutritious food and helped connect people in need to available resources. The health care organizations worked with IFFS to set a regular schedule for the food deliveries and two additional mobile clinic markets have been held. In January 2010, a mobile clinic market served more than 40 chronically ill patients at the Carolina Family Health Center in Princeville. Plans are in development for additional pilot locations, including Lincoln Community Health Center in Durham. Using other members of the North Carolina Association of Foodbanks, IFFS plans to expand the mobile clinic market project across the state.

Susan Yaggy notes, "In health care we tell patients to eat healthy, but often they don't have the resources to do that—especially for patients with chronic disease. Immediate translation of a provider's recommendation to eat healthy inside the clinic to fresh fruit and vegetables in the parking lot or back of the same clinic makes that recommendation concrete and achievable."

To learn more about Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, visit <http://www.foodshuttle.org>.

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