



3-minute case study: Get on the bus for fresh produce

By Lia Novotny | August 13, 2018

The problem

Healthy eating is an uphill battle for underserved families. They may not live near a grocery, know how to prepare a meal with available ingredients, or be able to find affordable food. All are at increased risk of developing food-related chronic diseases.

The solution

Boston's Fresh Truck, a nonprofit founded in 2013, creates access to healthy food for communities in three interconnected ways: Fresh Truck mobile markets, pop-up events, and Fresh Cash.

Fresh Truck's mobile markets – buses packed with fresh fruits and vegetables that visit the same locations each week – enable people to shop for healthy food close to home.

Fresh Truck tracks inventory by neighborhood to ensure they're offering the food that people there want to

buy. "For example," says Annika Morgan, Fresh Truck cofounder and chief program officer, "in our East Boston location [where the population is largely Hispanic] we always make sure to have two extra cases of plantains, because we sell through those really quickly."

Pop-up cooking demonstrations or nutrition classes held at block parties and other community events help immigrant families preserve their food traditions and eat healthfully, while driving customers to the mobile market buses. And the Fresh Cash program partners with healthcare organizations and housing agencies to distribute gift cards that can be redeemed at the mobile markets.

Those partnerships are where the impact broadens beyond neighborhoods.

Fresh Truck shares its data with healthcare partners on how many families are shopping, what they are buying, and where. In a pilot program, one partner, Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital, tracks which of its diabetes patients receive a weekly \$10 Fresh Cash card and sends

one of its nutritionists out to the bus to talk with those patients about their diets. Healthcare partners also use the markets as a place for patient outreach, as well as using the engagement data as a way to get to know their patients or clients better.

The outcome

Initial results from the Faulkner pilot have been encouraging, showing a reduction in HbA1C levels for enrolled patients.

"At Fresh Truck," says Morgan, "we are trying to think about how we can be not just a convenient grocery store, but knowing what we do about integrating with our shoppers' lives, ask how we can work with healthcare providers to be a food access solution for individuals and populations."

Lia Novotny is a frequent contributor to athenainsight.

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