

Voices of Double Up in America

Supporter



Born and raised in greater Kansas City, Brenda Calvin, program officer at Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, is personally and professionally rewarded by her work improving community health. The foundation's support of a Double Up Food Bucks pilot in five grocery stores in Kansas City in 2015 was so successful, it helped leverage a \$2.9 million federal grant to expand the Double Up program to 117 grocery stores and 68 farmers markets across Missouri and Kansas by 2019—the first multistate healthy food incentive program in the country.

Here are her words.

“ **GREATER KANSAS CITY** is a mix of both urban and rural—oddly enough in pretty close space, which may be a little different from other cities.

I think the perception outside of Kansas City may be that the Midwest is typically farmland and so we should have access to more food, but we're really growing more corn and less fresh produce that folks would typically consume. There are quite a few food deserts in the urban core and also in the rural areas despite the fact that we have a high

amount of growers. I believe we have a higher proportion of diet-related illnesses, above the national average.

The goal of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City is to eliminate barriers and promote quality health for the uninsured and underserved. Our service area is three counties in Kansas and three in Missouri, so we serve a bi-state area. There is a mix in terms of income level, food systems, and needs and availability of food in greater Kansas City.

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It's been proven that increased access to fresh produce helps to reduce incidences of chronic disease. And so our goal is to make sure that fresh produce is available for folks. As much as we can do to not only make sure that it's available, but also to educate, we believe that will help prevent the onset of chronic disease or stop it from progressing and getting worse.

Double Up Food Bucks allows us to increase access to healthier, nutritious food, but also to make sure that food is affordable. Over the long term, this will help improve outcomes for those who really need it the most and face the most barriers in terms of accessing fresh produce.

We're trying to level the playing field and make sure that there's equity and just food access. The cost on the front end, even including incentives, versus the larger cost that we would pay on the back end is well worth the investment. This is one small piece that we can do versus letting chronic disease manifest.

The Double Up pilot here was offered in five grocery stores in the areas of highest need in our city. We had greater-than-anticipated response from consumers at all of the grocery store locations, and we were able to get really good feedback about the products that were being offered. It's just a great system for educational purposes and ease of use for the consumer.

The local grocer, Price Chopper, was excited about the program and is excited to expand. They feel like they have the relationship with their consumers because they've gotten such positive feedback. And consumers feel that Price Chopper is really understanding their needs, that there's a true partnership, and that there's true investment in their communities.

The pleasant surprise for us is that this has turned out to be a great model of multi-sector and multi-dimensional collaboration. It was not just partners in the healthy communities' field, but partners and funders outside of the field, with stakeholders such as small businesses, state agencies, and a large-scale collaborative of growers. I think that has been



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Program Officer
Health Care Foundation of
Greater Kansas City

the biggest surprise—to have commitment from some of those nontraditional partners and to see the large-scale interest in this type of project and understanding of the health benefit in the long term.

I actually grew up in greater Kansas City and in one of our counties of highest need, which is Wyandotte County. So to see this type of investment from partners from multiple sectors, to know that the message is spreading, to see benefits of investing in this field, in this work, in this education overall, and to be in a position to have exponential impact, is probably the greatest personal and professional reward I can receive.”