



# CSUN's Champions for Change: A Qualitative Assessment for Healthy Communities Initiatives

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## Background

According to the CDC, an estimated 18.5% of U.S. children and adolescent population 2-19 y have obesity, 5.6% with severe obesity, and 16.6% of the population are overweight (2018). Hispanic adults and children/adolescents had higher prevalence of obesity compared to other ethnic groups (2017).

## Purpose

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the CSUN Champions for Change implementation of community gardens and SNAP-ed approved nutrition education and workshops.

## Methods

### Participants

Study participants were recruited utilizing a previously existing list from Champions for Change classes.

- Focus group 1: 6 participants
- Focus group 2: 5 participants
- Focus group 3: 5 participants

### Focus Groups

Focus group sessions were 20-35 minutes long. There were 6 open-ended questions to investigate the participants' impressions and observations about the program and any changes in nutrition and health-related behaviors.

- What was your overall experience with the Champions for Change program?
- Which parts of the program did you find most useful?
- What did you like best about the program?
- Which parts of the program did you find least useful?
- How could the program be changed or improved?
- Have you and/or your family made any changes due to the program? If so, what kind of changes?

### Analysis

Focus groups were audio recorded and notes taken. All three sessions were conducted in Spanish and then translated to English. Utilizing ethnographic qualitative methods, themes were identified.

## Results

Themes	Codes	Quotes
<b>Experience</b>	Participants described their engagement in the program as having many positive outcomes in themselves, their family, and their community. Overall, the program increased nutrition awareness and helped to make healthier food choices	"I think it's really good because it inform us, we learn things we didn't know about foods, their content and stuff like that." "I like it because it helps me to be better, to better prepare food for me and my children."
<b>Gardening</b> 	Participants perceived benefits from gardening were fresh, seasonal, and better-quality produce, learning space utilization for gardening, and children being able to learn about planting and harvesting.	"...they teach us that in a small place you can put several things, there are times people don't have enough space and have small places and they can learn that in a small place they can plant something that nourishes."
<b>Physical Activity</b> 	Participants reported increased awareness on the importance of exercising and felt motivated to increase physical activity in themselves and their family.	"... it is good that we walk more, do physical activity with children, also that we go out walking with children, ah we do a sport with them." "Now I'm already walking a little more and do more exercise...and it's helped a lot because I've lost weight."
<b>Nutrition</b> 	The main nutrition topics learned from the program were My Plate, food portion sizes, nutrition label reading, healthy recipes, and balanced meals.	"I focus more on my plate to give them a balanced meal." "The whole wheat ones...I did not know how to cook them, and I learned that with Viri." "We also learned how to read the labels."
<b>Lifestyle Changes</b>	Participating in the program increased family healthy eating acceptance and personal motivation. The gardening portion offered the opportunity for socializing and creating a sense of community among participants.	"I have changed my form of eating so I've also seen my daughter saying things like "now we can eat this". "...learn from each other... Basically so we can all learn as a community."

## Discussion

The Champions for Change program has offered more than 741 classes. Evidence based curriculum (nutrition label reading, meal planning, food groups) offered an engaging classroom setting. Results showed that participants are motivated and apply the information at home.

To date more than 78,000 individuals have been impacted (directly and indirectly)

According to our qualitative data, outcomes showed positive impacts in regard to increasing nutrition knowledge, accessing fresh produce, and gardening to utilize space available.



## Implications

This study allowed for a better understanding of the positive impact the Champions For Change program had on the SNAP-Ed community. Implementing nutrition and gardening programs in schools permits participants to increase their nutrition, physical activity, and gardening knowledge to make healthy changes. Future research could access biomarkers of change and weight changes from the implementation.

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