

Seeking Community Health and Wellbeing

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As minister of food justice at UrbanMission Community Partners, I am always mindful of a church's role in addressing issues of hunger in its community, especially the church as it exists in the center of an under-resourced urban neighborhood. Food pantries, soup kitchens, and community gardens are typical, and are great ways to begin. However, in order to address the issue of hunger, churches have to do more. Typical services, while providing a much needed and welcomed bandage, will not reach the systemic roots of the problem. Churches must reach outward in collaborative efforts with likeminded partners in their community. Identifying potential partners and the willingness to play on the same team is the first step to a church remaining relevant in their community.



At UrbanMission Community Partners, we have organized concerned community stakeholders interested in making systemic change, exploring ways in which to create sustainable solutions to the problem of food insecurity. From this community input, UMCP is now implementing a community health and wellness education program for neighborhood families utilizing existing community partners, each with their own stake in the wellbeing of our community. One of those partnerships is with Western University of Health Sciences and its College of Graduate Nursing. In this

collaboration, student interns work with community stakeholders to implement and maintain a health and wellbeing curriculum around sound nutritional decision making.

As well, we have established an urban agricultural program on the campus of UrbanMission, with the intent of involving our community in growing produce for themselves. Gardening, while a challenging endeavor, is an excellent way to build community buy-in, provide access to healthy foods, and acts as a therapeutic tool. As the community learns to grow for themselves, they are slowly liberated from an “empire” system of food production. We encourage this as a “way of life,” helping to lead a shift towards “slow food” among our families, encouraging positive health and behavior among our next generations.



The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.