

Success Story

Creating a Sustainable Youth Garden for Penobscot Nation

SUMMARY

In 2016, **Maine SNAP-Ed** and the **River Coalition** teamed up with the **Penobscot Nation Youth Program** to build a community garden. Local garden supply stores donated materials and seeds. Even garden challenges like groundhogs did not deter the dedicated group of community members working to familiarize children with how food grows and to inspire them to eat more fruits and vegetables. In the first year, the youth garden emphasized the importance of healthy eating in a hands-on learning environment, exposing up to **126 children** to fresh, local produce.



CHALLENGE

Obesity is a growing epidemic across the United States and is associated with increased risk for **chronic diseases** like diabetes. In Maine, 2 out of 3 Maine adults and 41% of Maine children are overweight or obese.

Eating more fruits and vegetables adds nutrients to diets, reduces the risk for chronic disease, and helps manage body weight when consumed as part of overall healthy diet.

Maine SNAP-Ed works with local community coalitions to support sustainable changes that help **reduce the burden of obesity** across Maine.

MAINE



SNAP-Ed

Healthy Eating on a Budget

Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a USDA-funded program that teaches low-income Mainers the knowledge and skills needed to make healthier lifestyle choices.

In 2015, the program began implementing Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change strategies in a variety of local community settings. By making sustainable changes to the environment, Nutrition Educators are fostering healthy behaviors that aim to **reduce the burden of obesity across Maine**.

In 2015, Maine SNAP-Ed PSE efforts reached 2,498 individuals eligible for SNAP and a total of 7,118 Mainers were reached.

In 2016, Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators helped establish seven school gardens across the state, including this garden plot.

SOLUTION

Maine SNAP-Ed teamed up with tribal community members to establish a youth garden located within walking distance from the community center. The huge garden space (approximately 25ft x 36ft) pictured below was established and maintained by the **Penobscot Nation Youth Program**. The Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator will use the produce grown in the garden for **educational opportunities as well as to provide healthy snacks** for youth programming. This year, children from the Penobscot Nation child care center will use the garden to learn about where food comes from and will help plant vegetable seedlings. Excess produce gleaned from the garden will be donated to the local **food pantry**.



SUSTAINING SUCCESS

During the first growing season of the garden, the youth group faced some setbacks including a determined groundhog that ate most of the produce, leaving only carrots and lettuce for the children to eat.

Learning from their experiences during the first year, community members developing plans to improve their garden in 2017. The garden group is working to get more departments within Penobscot Nation's Social Services to participate. This growing season, each department of Penobscot Nation Social Services has chosen a vegetable and will work with their Youth Program to start seedlings for the garden. This community commitment will **increase the produce available and support the garden's sustainability going forward**.



PARTNERS in SUCCESS

- River Coalition
- Penobscot Nation Social Services, including: Child Care Center, Youth Program & Teen Center, Food Pantry, Tribal Family Advocate, Prevention Coordinator
- Indian Island School
- Local Garden Stores

"This program is a way to bring together children, families, and the community."

**—Shaunda Neptune,
Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition
Educator**

For more Success Stories from the Maine SNAP-Ed program, or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit www.mainesnap-ed.org.

Data sources are available upon request by emailing mainesnap-ed@une.edu.

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