

ACTION CONNECTION

FALL/WINTER 2011

In this issue:

- Executive Director's Report
- Preventing Youth Violence through Neighborhood Fun
- City Breaks Ground on Long Awaited Lowell Community Garden
- New Folks at Metro...
- Thank You for Your Service...
- Land Use Planning – It Makes a Difference for Your Health
- Your Contribution Makes a Difference!

Youth Policy Council to Address Nutrition and Neighborhood Issues

By Karen Clifton, Hunger & Nutrition Program Director

Students at Tehipite Middle School are taking on a new project in collaboration with Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger & Nutrition program. A group of 20 seventh and eighth grade students are taking part in the *Fresno Food to Fitness Youth Policy Council*, which aims to teach youth how to advocate for changes in their community.



Fresno FOOD 2 FITNESS
Youth Policy Council

"Being a part of this council has made me more aware of my health and that makes me want to make better decisions when I am at home," said

an eighth grade member of the Council. "We are also learning how to make positive changes in our neighborhoods."

See **Youth Policy Council** page 5

The Valley Finally Has a Report to Substantiate the Environmental and Social Hazards Residents Face

By Sarah Sharpe, Environmental Health Program Director

While the San Joaquin Valley produces some of the nation's richest agricultural resources, 51 percent of the people who live and work here face elevated levels of air and water pollution coupled with high levels of social vulnerability, including poverty, limited formal education, lack of English fluency and racial and ethnic segregation, a UC Davis study found.

"Our conclusion is that immediate and comprehensive action is needed by local, regional and state policy makers to protect the health and well-being of the region's most vulnerable residents," said Jonathan London, assistant professor and director of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, who led the study.

The report, "**Land of Risk/Land of Opportunity**," found that residents of the region report more environmental hazards than are



See "**Land of Risk/Land of Opportunity**" page 7

We would like to hear from you! Please send comments to metromin@fresnometmin.org.

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NOTES FROM RICHARD P. YANES, JD,
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



An Opportunity Not Yet Missed— Changes that are Coming in Health Care

On September 20, the Board of Supervisors voted 3 to 2 to suspend discussions designed to develop a health services program, which would have replaced the existing costly and inefficient county program that has been in operation, largely unchanged, since the mid-90s. The program, required of each county by the State, provides health care to indigent adults— the poorest of our neighbors who are without health care coverage.

Fresno County has always struggled with its mandated health care requirements. For the last 16 years it has fulfilled its requirement through a contract with Community Regional Medical Centers (CRMC), paying it \$20 million per year to operate its Medically Indigent Services Program (MISP). Long neglected, the program has been plagued with obstacles that have limited enrollment in the program, made it difficult to secure both primary and specialist care and, all too often, failed to provide needed language and other culturally related assistance to its patients.

Major changes, however, are coming.

January 1, 2014, is the date the major provisions of the national Affordable Care Act (ACA) becomes effective. On that date, most of the nation’s and Fresno County’s uninsured will be required to secure coverage or be eligible for a health care program. In order to assist in this transition, counties were offered the opportunity to develop a “bridge” program to begin enrolling and serving eligible indigent MISP individuals as well as an expanded low-income population. The new program, called the Low Income Health Program (LIHP), would have been supported by federal dollar-for-dollar matching funds, estimated in Fresno County to amount to between 26 and 28 million additional dollars per year for 2012 and 2013. The idea was that the counties would redesign their state required programs to more closely conform to the requirements of the ACA in order to make the transition to 2014 as easy as possible. All counties in California are engaged in this redesign process excluding the 10 counties that have already developed their new program.

The Board of Supervisors’ action was opposed by Metro and a variety of nonprofit organizations, the major federally qualified health clinics that serve the Fresno area and a variety of individuals, many of whom were health care providers. Not content to let this opportunity slip away, this core group has evolved into a task force, which now includes the major hospitals in the area as well as the Hospital Council. The task force is dedicated to developing an LIHP that is cost effective, carries no significant fiscal risk to the County and provides quality service to the broadest targeted population possible. We are planning on completing our work by March and intend on returning to the Board of Supervisors where we hope to convince them to reach a different decision.

Did you know? The Fresno area poverty rate rose from 21.5% in 2009 to 26.8% in 2010. More than 1 in 4 residents live in poverty.

U.S. Census Data

Preventing Youth Violence through Neighborhood Fun

By Arthur Servin, Summer Night Lights Program Assistant

The sound of sizzling skillets, chopping on a cutting board and chatter among youth and adults is what you might hear on Wednesday night at Romain Neighborhood Center. The same goes for Holmes Neighborhood Center on a Friday night. What is being heard is the healthy cooking class, which is part of a diverse list of activities offered at these two neighborhood centers in Central Fresno.

Since July, community member of all ages have been learning karate, break dancing, cultural art and healthy recipes, and even getting much needed exercise through Zumba and swimming in summer months, as part of Fresno Metro Ministry's newest project— Summer Night Lights (SNL). The project is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative and provides free recreation activities and classes Monday through Friday, each week to residents living in Central and Southeast Fresno and beyond, through The City of Fresno PARCS Department. SNL aims to address youth violence prevention in key neighborhoods in Fresno where the issue is most prevalent by organizing residents so they can better utilize resources available to them at neighborhood centers and advocate for needed improvements.

According to the Fresno Police Department arrest records from 2009-2010, an average of 52 juvenile arrests were made in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Holmes and Romain, as compared to an average of only six in the larger surrounding areas.



Romain neighborhood kids enjoy a weekly healthy cooking class.

Projects like *Summer Night Lights* that engage families help to keep our youth off the streets and give them a place to be productive and participate in healthy activities. These types of programs are needed more than ever, during this economic downturn.

"We are very fortunate to have this program in our neighborhood," said Lorraine Potts, an adult who regularly uses the community centers. "There is a diverse culture and lots of activities to keep the kids busy."

Since *Summer Night Lights* began six months ago, hundreds of individuals, parents and children have returned for fun and informative activities and the participation continues to grow.

City Breaks Ground on Long Awaited Lowell Community Garden

By Tom Matott, Gardens Manager

Fresno Metro Ministry and the City of Fresno have begun the construction of another community garden. The garden will be located in the Lowell District at the intersection of Belmont and Poplar, across from the recently built San Pablo Family Park.



Lowell residents help to turn empty lot into thriving community garden.

Features of this garden will include 40 plots of different sizes, several raised bed boxes and community areas for fruits and flowers.

"We are excited about the garden because it is a positive way for us to connect with our neighbors. It also promotes healthy living, and an appreciation for where our food comes from," said Neva Popenoe, Lowell community resident. "Plus, we're excited to have a sunny spot to grow some of our own veggies."

Metro and the City of Fresno expect to have the infrastructure for the garden in place by early 2012, with a target date for the first plantings to be in the ground by March. Metro will be working closely with Lowell community residents and neighborhood associations to ensure the site will meet the needs of the gardeners and neighbors, as well as supporting the burgeoning Lowell Community.

"The community garden in Lowell will be a terrific opportunity to connect with neighbors, grow and share healthy bounty and teach our kids where their food comes from," said Barbara Fiske, member of the Lowell Neighborhood Association.

If you would like to contribute to the development of the site or have an interest in developing a garden in your neighborhood, please contact Tom Matott at 559-485-1416 or via email at tom@fresnometmin.org.



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New Folks at Metro...

Metro is proud to welcome our newest Board Member—**Francine L. Oputa** and two new staff members **Lisa Cisneros** and **Arthur Servin**.

Francine L. Oputa is the Director of the Central Valley Cultural Heritage Institute at California State University, Fresno and brings with her a wealth of experience related to our diverse cultures. Having served on a variety of community boards, including previous service on Metro’s Board, Francine has an understanding of some of the most significant issues facing our neighborhoods. We welcome her return to the Board.

Lisa Cisneros is the newest addition to the Metro team. As a Program Assistant on Special Projects, she brings her considerable experience in a variety of capacities with the Food Bank to her work on universal breakfast for students, implementation of the school district’s Wellness Policy and the after-hours and weekend use of school grounds for recreational purposes by neighborhood residents. We’re pleased to welcome Lisa to Metro’s staff.

Arthur Servin has also joined the Metro team and is responsible for organizing youth and parents at the Romain and Holmes Community Centers as part of a youth violence reduction initiative funded in part by The California Endowment. Arthur’s experience in working with youth as part of the Fresno PARCS Department’s Community Science Workshop provides a natural transition to his work at Holmes and Romain. We’re happy to welcome Arthur to the Staff.

Thank You for Your Service...

We also express our gratitude to **Reyna Villalobos, MPH** for more than four years of service as Metro’s Fresno County Director for the Central California Regional Obesity and Prevention Program. Her tireless efforts were a great contribution to this work. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.

Metro Mission Statement

Fresno Metro Ministry is a faith-based organization that works to create a more respectful, compassionate and inclusive community that promotes social and economic justice.

Metro advocates for change in community and institutional systems through collaboratives involving individuals, organizations, elected officials, and religious institutions. Currently Metro advocates for:

- Health Care Access
- Nutrition Education and Food Security
- Clean Air and a Healthy Environment
- Cultural and Religious Diversity and Understanding
- Supportive Human Services

Youth Policy Council

continued from page 1

The *Youth Policy Council* will identify priority areas relating to access to healthy foods and physical activity relative to their communities and schools. The Council will also work on a number of events throughout the year, including a youth-led conference and meetings with local and state policy makers about their efforts.

“I like being a part of the council, it has been a fun,” said a seventh grade council member. “We are learning how to communicate with our decision makers so we can make changes in the places we live.”

The *Youth Policy Council* started its work in September and will continue through June of 2012. Metro staff anticipates continuing the *Youth Policy Council* work and expanding the



World Champion Boxer Jenifer Alcorn visits Youth Council at Tehipite Middle School.

project into other schools in different areas of the City.

“This project is introducing the kids to a broad range of knowledge on nutrition issues and how their

environment plays a role in their health,” explained a Tehipite teacher. “Some of these students have not been exposed to these kinds of issues... This experience is very important for them to have.”

Tehipite Middle School was selected as the site for the first youth council because of the diversity of the neighborhood and the incidence of poverty in the area. The *Fresno Food to Fitness Youth Policy Council* represents Metro’s first youth-led project.

Metro was one of 11 nonprofits in nine states selected to receive funding from ConAgra Foods Foundation’s Community Impact Grants program. After a highly competitive two-step process, the 11 organizations were awarded grants totaling more than \$400,000 to support their innovative approaches to help fight child hunger. Metro received a \$40,000 grant for its new *Fresno Food to Fitness Youth Policy Council*.

“We hope to continue with youth-led work,” said Richard P. Yanes, Metro Executive Director. “We have a real opportunity to duplicate the Youth Policy Council model in other underserved areas of the community and truly make a difference.”

Thank you to all who joined us
for our

41st Anniversary Awards Dinner

We look forward to many more years of advocacy to create a more respectful, compassionate and inclusive community.

Again, congratulations to our

2011 Honorees:

Jenifer Alcorn - *Team Jab*
Dr. John Telles - *The Heart Group*
The kNOw Youth Media
Every Neighborhood Partnership

And a very special thank you to our community sponsors for their generous support.

Metro Community Champion



Metro Community Hero

Anthem Blue Cross
CalViva Health

Metro Community Advocate

California Gastroenterology Associates
Central California Faculty Medical Group
Fresno-Madera Medical Society
Premier Valley Bank
Sebastian Enterprises, Inc.
Selma Auto Mall

Land Use Planning – It Makes a Difference for Your Health

By Mike Wells, Environmental Health Program Assistant Director
& Richard P. Yanes, Executive Director

Most of us don't think of land use planning as having an impact on our health – but it does!

Locating parks in areas close to our homes provides places for children and families to engage in health building activities. How our streets and neighborhoods are designed or improved can make it easier to walk or bicycle to work, shop or play, providing needed exercise and eliminating the pollution from one more car trip. And it seems obvious that locating industries and businesses that present toxic hazards away from our neighborhoods is something that should be done but that's often not the case in the Valley. Where we locate our next housing development, and how it is designed, will determine whether we continue to create "sprawl" in Fresno or begin to develop neighborhoods that support and improve the health of our residents.

All of this and more begins with land use planning. Currently, Fresno is in the midst of completing major land use planning, which will have an impact on our lives, our neighborhoods and our City for decades to come. Within the next six months, Fresno will have completed its Downtown Neighborhoods Plan and its Fulton Corridor Specific Plan, both of which will contribute to the City's General Plan Update, due for completion by the end of 2012.

So it's important to have input on the plans before they are adopted. And equally important to monitor those plans over time to assure that specific improvements slated for our neighborhoods have the resources and the City's commitment to bring them about. That is how a bus stop gets an overhead



Community residents engage in leadership building training at Dickey Youth Center.

shelter, a street gets needed sidewalks or a neighborhood gets a park.

And that's why, for almost a year, Fresno Metro Ministry has been coordinating efforts to bring the perspective and comments from the residents of some of our most underserved neighborhoods into these planning processes. Metro has been engaged in the Smart Valley Places Community Leadership Institute— a Valley-wide initiative involving 14 cities over eight counties designed to implement sustainable land use development. Twenty-five residents from Fresno and 25 from Clovis are engaged in a six week training program, which provides them with practical knowledge about city planning practices and how to advocate for needed improvements as the City implements its plans.

"I believe people care deeply about our neighborhoods, schools and communities, but often are at a loss for how to go about making positive contributions," stated Christina Alejo, a Metro Board member and Institute trainee. "Through this training series, Smart Valley Places is providing a wonderful opportunity for us to become meaningfully engaged in creating the change we would like to see."



Training Institute participants tour Downtown Fresno.



“Land of Risk/Land of Opportunity”

continued from page 1

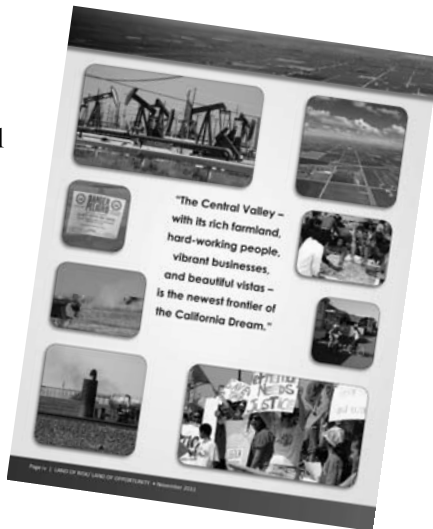
currently documented or addressed by state agencies. These hazards include air and water pollution from industrial waste and emissions, agricultural pesticides and vehicle traffic. Social vulnerability was evaluated by looking at poverty, English fluency rates, age and ethnicity. Researchers also mapped health risks throughout the region.

The study uses a new measure — *the Cumulative Environmental Vulnerability Assessment (CEVA)* — to identify the locations and populations within the San Joaquin Valley that are at greatest risk. The study found that 51 percent of San Joaquin Valley residents endure high cumulative environmental vulnerability. Further, these conditions are found “in an acute manner” in more than 1.2 million residents (31 percent of the population of the region), who face extreme environmental and social vulnerability. All of these residents have high exposure to social and environmental vulnerabilities, meaning many are exposed not only to toxics, but their social conditions make it more difficult for them to advocate on their own behalf, the report said.

Home to 4 million people, the San Joaquin Valley spans 300 miles through the center of the state, is a major transportation artery connecting northern and southern California, and contains three of the nation’s top-producing agricultural counties — Fresno, Kern and Tulare — according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The report found:

- San Joaquin Valley residents reported exposure to more environmental hazards than are currently documented or addressed by state agencies.
- The combined dangers were not evenly distributed across the region. Some of the communities facing extreme levels of vulnerability include west Fresno, Monterey Park Tract, Kettleman City, Matheny Tract, Earlimart and Wasco.
- Environmental and social vulnerability among at-risk populations persist, despite special attention from regulators and policy makers.



- Designating the most at-risk communities as Cumulative Environmental Vulnerability Action Zones (CEVAZ) can help focus local, regional, and state policy on lifting up the the health and well-being of the San Joaquin Valley as a whole.

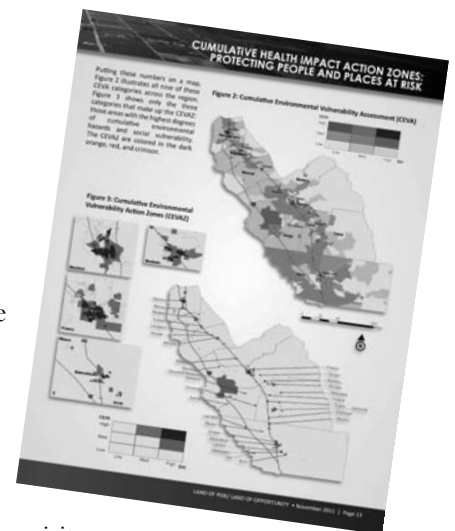
“With this report, we finally have the data that can lead to collaboration and action,” said Kevin Hamilton, deputy chief of programs at Clinica Sierra Vista and member of the San Joaquin Valley Cumulative Health Impact Project, which partnered with UC Davis on the study. “It’s obvious to all that there are health and other disparities, but there’s been a lack of data available to help communities, businesses and government collaborate to take next steps.”

The report recommends that the analysis of cumulative impacts be integrated into existing policy and planning frameworks in the region and that special attention be given to certain, higher-risk areas for greater protection, coordination, investment and community and public agency engagement.

“With one in two residents at elevated risk and one in three at extreme risk, now is the time to solve big problems by looking at the big picture. Without broad discussion and creative solutions, the San Joaquin Valley, especially its children, can’t reach its full potential,” said Sarah Sharpe, Fresno Metro Ministry’s Environmental Health program director, who coordinates the San Joaquin Valley Cumulative Health Impacts Project. “This report provides policy makers, government agency leaders, and community activists a tool to measure the cumulative impacts on Valley residents and a road map to prioritizing solutions to these problems.”

Funding for the study was provided through a generous grant from the Ford Foundation through a sub-award from the Environmental Justice Project of the UC Davis John Muir Institute of the Environment. Additional funding was provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as well as the Community Forestry and Environmental Resource Partnerships graduate fellowship.

To view the full report and/or the executive summary, please visit: <http://bit.ly/ucdceva>.





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Your Contribution Makes a Difference!

Without the support of generous donors, *like you*, Metro would not be able to do the advocacy work that is so needed in our underserved communities.

During this season of giving, we hope you will keep Metro in mind when making your charitable contributions. We've enclosed a contribution envelope and remember... **There's no such thing as a donation too small.**

To learn more about Metro's programs, contact Chanel Ruiz-Mendez at 559-485-1416 or via email at chanel@fresnometmin.org.

Thank you!