

# The Open Door

## *Impacts and opportunities: Results from a discussion of the Open Door's healthy food access work*

In 2013, the Open Door received funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota through the Health Equity in Prevention (HEiP) initiative. Through its HEiP funding, the Open Door is influencing policy and legislation, changing organizational practices, and building coalitions and networks to reduce health inequities related to food.

In January 2015, a group of 16 project stakeholders were invited to a Ripple Effect Mapping discussion about the Open Door's healthy food access work. The discussion participants included Open Door staff, local gardeners, staff and students from Burnsville Alternative High School, and representatives from Keystone Community Services, Second Harvest Heartland, the Food Group, Dakota County Public Health, and the City of Eagan. The discussion was intended not only to provide the participants a chance to consider how successful the work has been in achieving its intended goals, but also to identify the indirect or unexpected project impacts.

### PROJECT IMPACTS

During the discussion, all participants had opportunities to describe the Open Door's achievements and to discuss the indirect impacts of its work. The participants grouped each of these observed impacts into four main types of changes that had taken place as a result of the Open Door's work: leading policy change; increasing access to healthy food; helping change local policy; building connections in the community; and supporting systems change.

Participants were not asked to rank the relative importance of these impacts in relationship to one another. However, the graphic included in this summary does show how many times the participants identified a change in each key area and offers a few examples of key impacts identified by the participants. A summary of the discussion related to each area of change is included in the summary, and the specific impacts identified by the participants during the mind mapping exercise are listed in the appendix.

#### **What is Ripple Effect Mapping?**

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is an evaluation tool used to better understand the intended and unintended impacts of a project. It is particularly helpful when evaluating complex initiatives that both influence, and are impacted by, the community. REM is a facilitated discussion with project staff and local stakeholders that creates a visual "mind map" during the discussion that shows the linkages between program activities and resulting changes in the community.

This approach is intended to help demonstrate the project's impacts more holistically and to describe the degree to which different types of impacts are observed by project staff and community stakeholders.

# Ripple Effect Mapping: The Open Door

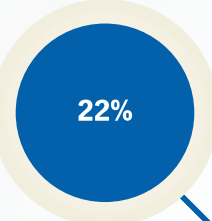


## SUPPORTING SYSTEMS CHANGE



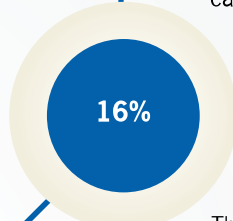
## LEADING POLICY CHANGE

The Open Door passed a comprehensive Healthy Food policy



## BUILDING CONNECTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

The Open Door demonstrates that food shelves can say no to certain unhealthy foods



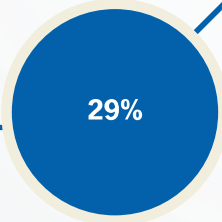
The Open Door is working to incorporate healthy food access into comprehensive land use plans

The Open Door sees itself as part of the food system



## INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

The Open Door is focused broadly on increasing the amount of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that are offered in its food shelves

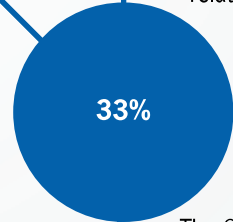


Community members have strengthened their health and well-being

Students are connecting to the Open Door's Mobile Pantry

The Open Door's healthy food access work

The Open Door is strengthening relationships with food banks



Community members are forming new connections

The Open Door is working more closely with the City of Eagan

### Leading policy change

The Open Door passed one of the most comprehensive healthy food policies in Minnesota that commits the organization to offering fresh, perishable food and removing non-nutritious food from its food shelves. Through the policy, the Open Door has focused on receiving healthy food from grocers and retailers through a food rescue partnership with Second Harvest Heartland. During the discussion, participants shared that the policy is a model for other food shelves and that the Open Door has been a leader in helping food shelves understand the importance of providing healthier options for their clients. The Open Door offered technical assistance and a workshop on healthy food approaches and policies to 25 organizations in Michigan whose work touches on food.

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*The Open Door is willing to take risks [in implementing its Healthy Food policy]. It takes lot of courage.*

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### Increasing access to healthy food

During the discussion, participants highlighted the Open Door's strong focus on increasing access to healthy food for their clients and community members. The Open Door concentrates on providing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while reducing sugary beverages and salt. Through its survey research, the Open Door has demonstrated that its clients want more healthy food options. A participant shared that community members prefer to go to the Open Door because of the quality of the food that is offered. A community member who has diabetes specifically chose to go the Open Door because of its healthy food. After eating more healthily, her insulin rates decreased. Other community members who use the Open Door have made changes to their eating habits as well by decreasing their consumption of soda and sweets. In addition to its brick and mortar food shelves, the Open Door also operates a Mobile Pantry that serves several locations including Burnsville Alternative High School. A participant shared that the Mobile Pantry has greatly helped students with limited access to food and transportation. Another participant who works at the high school noted that she references the healthy snacks students receive through the Mobile Pantry when talking to them about the impact of food on their health, energy, and learning.

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*The Mobile Pantry allows students to be independent, make their own food choices, contribute to their families, try new food, and take ownership of their health. Students are thinking ahead and preparing. They are learning independent living skills.*

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### Building connections in the community

Participants reported that the Open Door has strengthened ties to food banks and the City of Eagan, along with helping community members build social connections. The Open Door has established a closer relationship with the Food Group, a local food bank, focused on sourcing healthier, fresh food. Similarly, the Open Door worked with Second Harvest Heartland's Food Rescue program to procure fresh food for its food shelves. Through its garden and the support of other community gardens, the Open Door has fostered stronger connections between community members who tend to the local gardens and exchange gardening skills and tips. In addition, the City of Eagan Parks and Recreation Department and the Open Door work together to support access to healthy, local food. The department increased the number of vegetables planted in Holz Farm (a local farm supported by the department) with the intention of donating the produce to the Open Door. The department also worked with vendors from the Eagan Farmers Market to donate some of their leftover produce to the Open Door.

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*The gardeners at the Open Door are a close knit community. Everyone helps everyone, and it's our own little community. We can sit up there and relax.*

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## Supporting systems change

Participants underscored that the Open Door is a leader in helping food shelves plan and implement approaches that will increase the number of healthy food options for their clients. In addition, the Open Door is working with the City of Eagan and county planners to integrate healthy food access as part of comprehensive land use plans. It is also working with the Public Health Law Center to document different policies that cities and counties have regarding land use and healthy food access. Participants also pointed out that the Open Door helps inform the local food system through its work on the Food Access Network's Land Access Workgroup, and the actions it took to reinvigorate the Hunger Workgroup, which brings together food shelves and food banks to address key issues.

*The Open Door is on the forefront of demonstrating that food shelves can say no to certain unhealthy foods.*

*The Hunger Workgroup has been a collective voice for food shelves that might otherwise be working in silos.*

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Most of the challenges referenced by participants during the discussion focused on the Open Door's Healthy Food policy. Some mentioned that other local food shelves are hesitant to create a healthy food policy because they do not want to spark a political backlash or turn down food donations that do not fit the policy. Staff members from the Open Door acknowledged that after passing their policy they received some criticism that they were limiting their clients' choices. They also noted that food shelves' capacity can limit their ability to offer health food. For example, the Open Door has refrigerators to keep food from spoiling. One participant shared that some food shelves are in "survival mode" trying to meet the needs of their clients and feel they cannot focus on policy issues.

The following questions may be helpful for the Open Door and its partners to consider as they plan their future work:

- What role could the Open Door play in providing additional research and technical assistance on healthy food policies and expanding food shelves' offerings to include more healthy options? What local, state, and national partners could help the Open Door in these efforts?
- What strategies could the Open Door use to help communicate the impact of its Healthy Food policy? How can that message resonate with food shelves that are resistant to making changes or feel they do not have the capacity to make the changes?
- Are there other areas of the food system where the Open Door should play a role?

# APPENDIX: Project impacts identified by discussion participants



## LEADING POLICY CHANGE

The Open Door passed a comprehensive Healthy Food policy.

Other food shelves want to learn more about the Healthy Food policy. Not many have created their own policy. Instead, they are interested in observing the Open Door and want to see what they can learn from its experience.

Several food shelves want to use some of the positive, proactive approaches included in the Healthy Food policy, while not including the language that rejects unhealthy food.

"Limiting the food that is distributed still feels out there for some food shelves." -Participant

Food shelves are wondering "how do you actually do this? [They are] watching to see what issues come up, and what issues you have to deal with. [For example,] how do you work with the food rescue?" -Participant

Food shelves are implementing healthy food policies similar to the Open Door's policy.

The Open Door offered technical assistance and a workshop on healthy food approaches and policies to 25 organizations in Michigan whose work touches on food. As a result of the workshop three hunger relief organizations are working on crafting healthy food policies.

One food shelf has modeled the Open Door's policy very closely.

The Food Group, a local food bank, now provides technical assistance about how to write food policies.

After passing the policy, the Open Door has needed to be proactive in how it solicits healthy food. It has developed a strong communications strategy to focus on spreading the message about its focus on healthy food.

The Open Door, in partnership with Second Harvest, gets discarded food from several different grocers and retailers. The Open Door's Healthy Food policy allows them to reject unhealthy, discarded food in favor of healthier food.

The Health Department chose the Open Door for their holiday donations because of its focus on providing fruits and vegetables.

The Open Door "is willing to take risks. It takes a lot courage." -Participant



## INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

The Open Door is focused broadly on increasing the amount of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that are offered, while reducing sugary beverages and salt.

There is a misperception that the Open Door's clients prefer unhealthy food. However, through its research, the Open Door has demonstrated that clients want healthy food. Staff talk about how they are meeting their clients' demands by providing healthy food, rather than reducing their choices.

Community members prefer to come to the Open Door because of the quality of the food.

Some people who come to the Open Door have the perception that it is less convenient and more time consuming to prepare fresh, healthy food. The staff have addressed this concern by providing education about how it can take the same amount of time to prepare fresh and processed food.

The Open Door strengthens community members' health and well-being.

A participant highlighted that one of the outcomes of the Open Door's focus on providing healthy food is that their clients are eating more nutritiously and that this in turn has a positive impact on their health.

A community member who has diabetes specifically chose to go the Open Door because it has healthier food options. After eating more healthily, her insulin rates decreased.

Community members who are clients at the Open Door have decreased their intake of soda and other sweets.

The Open Door has supported the creation of multiple community gardens that have allowed more community members to garden and has increased the amount of whole, fresh food that is being grown.

A participant from the Health Department observed that clients of the Open Door are strengthening their overall well-being by increasing their social connections, volunteering, and physical activity, specifically through gardening. They are also reducing their stress and increasing their confidence.

A community member who gardens at the Open Door shared that her daughter's children fight over who gets to eat the tomatoes, and that she has made kale smoothies with one of her grandchildren.

A local chef teaches the Open Door gardeners how to cook the food that they grow.

Students are connecting to the Open Door's Mobile Pantry.

160 Burnsville Alternative High School students accessed the Open Door's Mobile Food Pantry. A school staff member shared that the Mobile Pantry "allows students to be independent, make their own food choices, contribute to their families, try new food, and take ownership of their health. Students are thinking ahead and preparing. They are learning independent living skills." The staff member also emphasized that 60 to 65 percent of students are on free and reduced lunch, and some are homeless or highly mobile. The Mobile Pantry helps these students meet their basic needs.

A coordinator at the high school shared that she references the healthy snacks students receive through the Mobile Pantry when talking to them about the impact of food on their health, energy, and learning.

A participant shared that the Mobile Pantry has helped students with limited access to food and transportation.

A student who uses the Mobile Food Pantry has developed a closer relationship with the Family Support Coordinator. The student has a better understanding of the coordinator's role and the resources she can offer, such as help with transportation.



## BUILDING CONNECTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

The Open Door is strengthening relationships with food banks.

The Open Door has established a closer relationship with the Food Group focused on sourcing healthier, fresh food.

From the perspective of the Food Group, the Open Door has been a "great thought leader around mobile food shelves."

The Open Door has procured 900,000 lbs. of food, 79 percent of which has been fresh, through Second Harvest Heartland's Food Rescue program.

Community members are forming new connections.

The Open Door's Mobile Lunch Box program builds a stronger sense of community. A participant shared that children who take part in the program spend time together through activities, learn about healthy food, and try new food. Because of their participation in the program they have a stronger "sense of empowerment and personal choice in choosing what [food they eat] and giving [new] foods a try."

Community members are connecting through gardening.

A participant shared that she has become more connected to other community members through taking part in the Open Door's garden.

The community gardens through local churches have built a stronger sense of community and connection among families who grow food together and teach each other gardening skills.

The Open Door provides seeds and equipment for community members to grow food in community gardens. One participant shared that this is "a wonderful blessing to have everything provided. We just have to put in the effort and commitment to make the garden grow and get the benefit of the vegetables."

A participant shared that the gardeners at the Open Door are a "close knit community. Everyone helps everyone, and it's our own little community. We can sit up there and relax."

The Open Door is working more closely with the City of Eagan.

Through a local food truck event, Finnegan's collected donations for the Open Door's Mobile Pantry. This also offered an opportunity for community members to learn more about the Mobil Pantry and the Open Door's work.

The City of Eagan Parks and Recreation Department and the Open Door share similar visions about access to healthy, local food. The Open Door helped the Parks and Recreation Department connect to local resources related to gardening and increasing healthy food.

The Parks and Recreation Department used to ask for canned and boxed good donations as admission to a Halloween event; however, the department changed and started to encourage people to donate more healthy food.

The City of Eagan Parks and Recreation Department increased the number of vegetables planted in Holz Farm with the intention of donating the produce to the Open Door.

The City worked with vendors from the Eagan Farmers Market to donate some of their leftover produce to the Open Door. Food donations for the Open Door are also collected from people who shop at the market.

The Open Door is very connected to its clients and community partners. It surveys its clients to discover their needs. It connects people to resources.

A participant shared that a local health organization that serves undocumented people refers people to the Open Door for assistance.



## SUPPORTING SYSTEMS CHANGE

The Open Door is "on the forefront" of demonstrating that food shelves can say "no" to certain unhealthy foods.

The Open Door has worked with other food shelves to help them focus on the types of food they want to offer their clients.

The Open Door is working to incorporate healthy food access into comprehensive land use plans.

The Open Door took the lead in working with the City of Eagan and county planners on integrating land and healthy food access as part of comprehensive land use plans.

The Open Door is working with the Public Health Law Center to document different policies that cities and counties have regarding land use and healthy food access.

Compared to other food shelves, the Open Door is unique in that it sees itself as part of the food system and has a presence on several boards and groups focused on food.

An Open Door staff member has played a key role on the Metro Food Access Network Land Access Workgroup, which has worked with the community gardens and is doing research on land access barriers in the metro area.

The Open Door has been instrumental in reinvigorating the Hunger Workgroup. It was inactive before the Open Door provided leadership. Over 30 food shelves and food banks are part of the workgroup.

[The work group] has been a collective voice for food shelves that might otherwise be working in silos. -Participant