

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center

BEST PRACTICES

- Opportunistic Change Making
- Clinical and Non-Clinical Collaboration
- Diverse Funding

ISSUE FOCUS

- Access to Primary Health Care
- Access to Healthy Food
- Neighborhood Revitalization

Background

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (BNHC) is a non-profit, multicultural, federally qualified community health center (FQHC). BNHC is designated as a Qualified Low-Income Community Business (as defined by New Market Tax Credit program regulations) and is incorporated as a Community Development Corporation (CDC) with the primary purpose of creating jobs in the community.

Demand for BNHC has accelerated after it started in 1994 as a mobile medical van in a church parking lot.

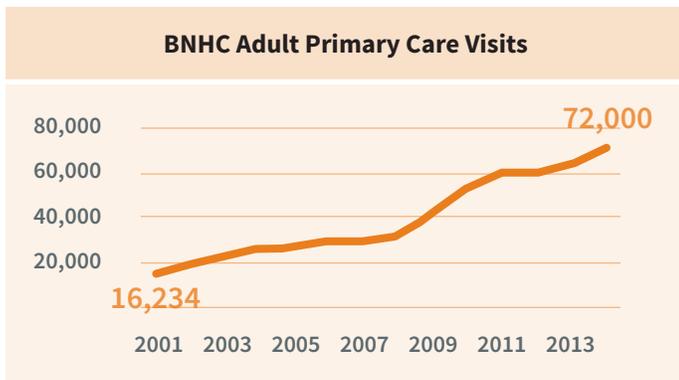
BNHC has since constructed and expanded its main site to accommodate the growing demand for local healthcare. The cost of its main site is about \$30 million, including the \$17 million for initial construction in 2007, a \$2.5 million expansion in 2010 and an \$11 million expansion in 2012. BNHC has positioned itself as a leader in community health through collaborative partnerships in Massachusetts; the clinic provides primary care services at its location at **Father Bill's and MainSpring** shelter for homeless people, coaches partners in the community's REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) program and works with the Brockton Area Community Health Network Area to address health service gaps in the community.

Demographics	BNHC	Brockton City, MA	MA
Population	28,000 patients	93,810	6,605,058
White Alone	21%	44%	76%
Black: 65%	Cape Verdean	30%	2%
	Haitian	15%	5%
	African American	12%	6%
	Other Countries	8%	NA
Latino/Hispanic	9%	10%	10%
Persons below poverty level	74%	18%	11%
Unemployment	NA	15%	8%
Non- English Speaking	42%	37%	22%
Lack health ins.	31%	4%	7%
Public health ins.	47%	32%	47%

Vicente's Tropical Grocery, opened in 1994, is an international grocery store specializing in Cape Verdean, Haitian and Portuguese foods as well as typical items. It has grown into an 18,000 square foot, full-service supermarket, employing 105 people and serving 56,000 customers annually. Jason Barbosa is Vicente's Operations Manager, taking the helm after his father started the original Vicente's grocery store. BNHC's CEO, Sue Joss, estimates that Vicente's and BNHC are two of the fastest growing businesses in Brockton.

Community Challenge

Despite expansions in 2007 and 2012, BNHC eventually outgrew its capacity for adult primary care services. Based in a medically underserved area and a federally qualified food desert, BNHC's community faces high rates of poverty and unemployment as well as low access to healthy food. Reliance on SNAP and EBT programs and rates of obesity, diabetes and other illnesses in Brockton are higher than those of Massachusetts in general.



Similarly, Vicente's owners found that their store was too small to accommodate the high demand for healthy foods. Based on the need to expand to meet the growing demand for their services within the community, they found a building in a lot that had been vacant for almost 20 years, and that had also contributed to the community's deterioration and high rates of crime. They decided to purchase the building and then looked to partner with a business to lease building space or to develop a new, adjacent building in order to make Vicente's expansion financially feasible. However, the only business that showed interest in partnering was McDonald's, and a partnership with it would only have exacerbated the existing healthy food access challenges in the neighborhood.

Solution

OPPORTUNISTIC CHANGE MAKING

In 2013, Sue Joss attended a meeting made up of community organizations and leaders. Vicente's Jason Barbosa also attended and was excited to announce that a new partner had been selected to co-locate with the grocery store. When he announced that the new partner was McDonalds, jaws dropped. Joss asked if there was anything the Brockton community could do in order to convince him to end this new partnership. "Find someone else to join the project," Jason responded.

Joss knew that BNHC had to expand, and quickly decided to propose to her team that BNHC could be Vicente's new partner. She went back to the Board of Directors and to stakeholders to discuss the idea. Two weeks later, they called Jason back to formalize the proposed partnership to address social determinants related to nutrition. With McDonald's eager to move in, Joss had to advocate for the community's health, and the team had many conversations so that the project's developer, Affirmative Investments, could eliminate McDonalds from the deal.

Joss recognizes that this project was spurred by networking and keeping their ears to the ground. She says, "It was just an opportunity—we had to grab it." Joss's intuition and ability to jump on opportunities exemplifies the strong and innovative leadership necessary for this type of change making. By focusing on poverty, cultural traditions, transportation, healthy food access, literacy and language barriers, this partnership targets three local public health issues: diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN CLINICAL AND NON-CLINICAL ORGANIZATIONS

BNHC and Vicente's collaborated through the architectural design process, project development and final stages of the development. Meeting once a week to discuss design, nutrition and operational plans gave time and space to coordinate and openly communicate from the beginning. Furthermore, using the mission-driven developer **Affirmative Investments** allowed for a better alignment of goals.

Reflecting on the community and political support of this development, the President of Affirmative Investments, David Ennis says, "It was such a positive impact on the neighborhood and city, so I think we had a lot of people rooting for us and helping us out." However, BNHC and Vicente's did face challenges. For instance, they wanted to share an entrance but were restricted by licensing regulations. Not surprisingly, the biggest challenge of all was financing this project. Luckily, Affirmative Investments was aware of unique financing tools and connected the project to a financing partner.

FINANCIAL MECHANISM

To cover the total development costs of roughly \$23 million, BNHC worked with LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) as the lead investor.

Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC) was also a significant contributor to Vicente's. LISC is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), which supports community development activities in low-income neighborhoods. In addition to providing a low-cost loan with federal

Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) resources to help fund Vicente's expansion, LISC also organizes the **Healthy Futures Fund**, which funds FQHCs using the **New Markets Tax Credits** (NMTc). In addition to managing the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), which helped fund Vicente's expansion, LISC also organizes the Healthy Futures Fund, which specifically funds FQHCs with New Markets Tax Credits (NMTc). The NMTcs were used to leverage financing and were capitalized with equity and a loan from Morgan Stanley, as well as a junior leverage loan from the **Kresge Foundation**.

Additionally, LISC partnered with the Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) and the Leviticus Fund to provide financing. Programming and other expenses are being funded through large grants from sources like the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the **Office of Community Services' Community Economic Development HFFI** and **Health Center New Access Point Grant** (NAP). Since the clinic is well-funded and located in a neighborhood lacking primary care services with growing primary care needs, BNHC expects to break even in annual operating expenses before the second year.

Outcomes

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Vicente's opened in July, 2015, and the new clinic opened in September 2015, creating safe community space and spurring revitalization to a blighted corner. The original Vicente's remains in business, and the BNHC's Main Street location will remain open. At least 75 percent of the new positions at Vicente's will be targeted to low-income community residents in order to combat the neighborhood's unemployment rate, which is greater than 15 percent.

BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS
CLINICAL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CASE EXAMPLES

New Community Impacts		
Demonstration/teaching kitchen		
Increased access to healthy food		
Increased access to health care (40,000 patient visits)		
Developed previously high-crime, vacant area		
	BNHC	Vicente's
Space (square feet)	13,600 (new construction)	32,000
Full-time, living wage jobs	52	150

With such a high demand for primary health care, the neighborhood will now have more people coming through, which also means more business for Vicente's. The clinic's influence on the neighborhood is already beginning to show. The developer and BNHC are beginning to discuss bringing a pharmacy and a medical diagnostics testing company to the area. Ennis says the area is "on the way to downtown so it's going to have a great impact."

OTHER BENEFITS

This new partnership flourished. Vicente's staff had never thought of themselves as nutritionists, but BNHC staff, including a dietician, helped them to understand their role in the community's health. They quickly became advocates for healthy foods and nutrition. The partnership benefits Vicente's, BNHC and the community. To gauge its impact, the partnership will be measuring three main indicators of health on a community level:

1. Hemoglobin A1c to calculate the prominence of diabetes
2. Low-density lipoproteins (LDL)
3. Weight to calculate body mass index (BMI)

The benefits of the partnership are obvious through neighborhood revitalization, employment and increased access to healthy food and adult primary care. A number of other outcomes include:

- Nutrition classes tailored to healthy ethnic foods will be offered at the clinic's teaching kitchen and Vicente's open grill.
- Marketing and promotion of healthy eating at Vicente's as advised by the clinic.
- Labelled nutritious food placed on eye-level shelves, ensuring that healthy food is the easiest choice. The partnership even plans on installing televisions throughout the store that will exclusively broadcast healthy cooking shows.
- A rewards program to incentivize patrons to buy healthy food. Food items have assigned points, with healthier foods counting for more points than unhealthy foods. When residents improve their scores, they can earn reward points and receive coupons for healthy foods. This system is based on [Syracuse's Shopper Rewards Program](#), a larger city-wide program in which many businesses are involved, and which mentored BNHC during its planning phases.

Through these environmental and programming strategies, Vicente's and BNHC are providing preventive healthcare and encouraging healthy eating to the entire community.

Tools

- [Market Analysis for Vicente's Tropical Grocery](#)
- [Syracuse's Shopper Rewards Program Presentation](#)

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