More Than $300K Coming to South Bronx to Improve Region's Health

By Eddie Small on December 15, 2014 9:54am @eddie_small

SOUTH BRONX — Sailing classes and a kitchen where people can learn how to cook nutritious meals could be on their way to the South Bronx as part of a new initiative to make the region a healthier place.

The New York Community Trust recently started giving out more than $300,000 in grants to local, city and state organizations to launch the initiative, known as the South Bronx Healthy and Livable Neighborhoods program.

Three local organizations are receiving grants of $45,000 each to develop health plans for South Bronx neighborhoods: BronxWorks, which will focus on Mott Haven, Urban Health Plan, which will focus on Hunts Point, and Claremont Neighborhood Centers, which will focus on Morrisania.

BronxWorks’ plan revolves around air quality, healthy eating and physical fitness. It would include activities like adding extra fitness programs in St. Mary’s Park, creating more appealing advertisements for health food stores and establishing a kitchen with the group BOOM!Health where people can learn how to cook healthy meals.

"It’s involving a number of different organizations, so it’s attacking the health problem from different ways,” said BronxWorks Assistant Executive Director John Weed. “Through art, through exercise, through air quality. It’s kind of hitting it on all fronts."

In Hunts Point, Urban Health Plan hopes to help grocers add and sell fresh food, establish after-school physical fitness programs like rowing and sailing, and develop training programs that will help residents
become fitness instructors.

And for Morrisania, Claremont Neighborhood Centers plans to create murals focused on healthy living, expand their basketball program from two to five days per week and hold healthy cooking demonstrations at various locations in the neighborhood.

While NYCT program officer Irfan Hasan acknowledged that money meant to improve health in the South Bronx has previously been poured into the neighborhood with mixed results, he stressed that this new program will differ from past efforts.

For instance, rather than focusing solely on getting Bronxites better access to health care, the initiative will aim on adding features like parks and health-conscious artwork to the neighborhoods, Hasan said.

The program also delegates a large amount of authority to local organizations, which Hasan also claimed would make it more effective.

“If you live in a neighborhood and are affiliated with an organization that is in your neighborhood, you’re far more likely to work with them than a big entity coming in and saying, ‘OK, here’s what you should do,’” he said.

The NYCT plan also includes grants of $100,000 each to the New York State Health Foundation and the Fund for Public Health of New York to help evaluate the program.

Hasan was optimistic about the impact the South Bronx Healthy and Livable Neighborhoods program could have, largely based on how many different aspects of health it would analyze.

"How can you look at things like environment, access to green spaces, as part of there being healthy living?" he asked. "So it’s approaching it from a little broader angle."

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