

## CREATING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY: The Healthy Pueblo Wellness Initiative

Pueblo del Sol, Los Angeles



*It's sunset. The lights in the buildings of downtown Los Angeles are twinkling just to the west, and at Pueblo del Sol, groups of women and families are walking steadily along the new walking trail, water bottles in hand, while children play soccer on the field of Pueblo Park. Next door, in the dance studio of the Mendez Learning Center, women are participating in a Zumba class, while other residents work out on exercise machines located in the development's Management Building. At Pueblo del Sol, families are learning and actively participating to become more healthy and fit.*

Capitalizing on the individual health programs Urban Strategies has offered at Pueblo del Sol for years and the great physical amenities at the development, a collaborative health awareness and improvement effort was created for the community to enhance its local health strategies. In partnership with McCormack Baron Salazar and McCormack Baron Ragan, Urban Strategies is now implementing the Healthy Pueblo Wellness Initiative ("Healthy Pueblo") at Pueblo del Sol to improve the health and well-being of families living in the community.

Pueblo del Sol is a HOPE VI mixed-income development located in the historically low-income community of Boyle Heights on the east side of the City of Los Angeles. Urban Strategies operates the Community Service Center and provides a variety of much needed community support services to residents of Pueblo del Sol and the surrounding community, serving over 2,500 children, youth, and adults per year.

### Program Objectives and Components

The objectives of Healthy Pueblo are to:

- 1) Increase the residents' awareness of health and wellness (including their own);
- 2) Help residents feel better (improve their health) where they live; and
- 3) Create a healthy living environment to improve and support residents' health behaviors.



Residents stretch at a Healthy Pueblo Zumba Class

To carry out these objectives, Urban Strategies and its partner agencies are implementing a series of programs, activities, and policies that together will increase the wellness of families and create a healthy living community at Pueblo del Sol.

Healthy Pueblo consists of several complementing components, including:

- 1) Providing programs and activities for all residents, around four areas: health assessment and care, healthy eating and cooking, health education, and healthy fitness and recreation;
- 2) Encouraging residents' increased use of the amenities at Pueblo del Sol, including pool, fitness center, and walking trail;
- 3) Establishing policies that will support a healthy community, including No Junk Food in the Community Service Center and Management Buildings, and No Smoking throughout Pueblo del Sol – first in all common areas beginning November 15, 2012 in recognition of National Smoke Out Day, then in all apartment units beginning January 1, 2013; and
- 4) Initiating the short-term pilot project called the “Pueblo Challenge.”

### Healthy Pueblo Kick Off

This June, Urban Strategies officially launched the Healthy Pueblo initiative by holding a Kick-Off Celebration, in conjunction with a Health and Literacy Fair undertaken by one of its partner agencies, Para Los Niños. Urban Strategies, MBS and MBR staff, together with partner agencies, conducted demonstrations of Healthy Pueblo programs – such as a Zumba session, a nutrition workshop, a tour of the Fitness Center and demonstration of proper use of exercise equipment, and tours of the pool and new walking trail.



At the Healthy Pueblo Kick Off on June 23, 2012, residents check in and check on their health

### The “Pueblo Challenge”

One week following the Kick-Off, the “Pueblo Challenge” project of Healthy Pueblo was initiated with 21 families. The “Pueblo Challenge” is a three-month pilot project where we challenge 25 Pueblo del Sol families to take active control of their health by participating in programs at the Community Service Center and beyond, engaging in physical fitness activities at Pueblo del Sol and the surrounding community, eating better, getting check-ups, etc. The project will provide us with a snapshot of the health status of the participating families and help us determine the impact of our programming, physical amenities, and policies on their overall health and well-being.

To help guide and implement Healthy Pueblo and the “Pueblo Challenge,” an Advisory Committee of partner agencies and stakeholders was established and consists of representatives from Urban Strategies, McCormack Baron Salazar, McCormack Baron Ragan, the Los Angeles Christian Health Centers, White Memorial Medical Center, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Southern California (USC), and the Variety Boys & Girls Club. The Committee meets on a bimonthly basis, and helps to identify project goals and objectives, and guiding principles. The Advisory Committee engaged the assistance of UCLA and USC researchers to provide expert advice on program design and to conduct an evaluation for the “Pueblo Challenge” pilot program of Healthy Pueblo.

**Recommendations on Amenities and Programming for other MBR Sites**

While we cannot yet determine the actual outcomes of Healthy Pueblo, and while we await the completion of the “Pueblo Challenge” and evaluation findings, there are a number of things that, in partnership, MBS, MBR and Urban Strategies staff can work on now to create a healthy living environment in communities we serve across the country. With respect to physical design MBS and MBR staff can work to:

- 1) Design and include an indoor Fitness Center that can be easily accessed by residents via keycard, and provide occasional instruction on proper use of fitness equipment;
- 2) Design and make space for a walking trail on project sites to include outdoor fitness stations along the trail with signage on how to use such equipment;
- 3) Design a pool and allow Urban Strategies to program swim and water fitness classes for residents of all ages for ensuring maximum use;
- 4) Implement a No-Smoking Policy throughout all residential units, community buildings and common areas of all housing sites and, with support from Urban Strategies, provide health education on the effects of smoking; and
- 5) Implement a No-Junk Food policy at all management and community buildings and common areas throughout the development, and encourage the consumption of healthy foods.



Children reach for nutritious snacks during the Healthy Pueblo Kick Off event.

In addition to creating and providing for physical amenities, Urban Strategies can coordinate the provision of a variety of health and wellness and fitness programming at their operational sites in partnership with local agencies in their communities. Programs may include:

- 1) Healthy cooking and eating and nutritional classes;
- 2) Health education classes;
- 3) Implementation of an educational campaign to educate residents on topics ranging from immunization, diabetes, and heart health, to name a few; and
- 4) Fitness Activities to include Zumba, Yoga and swim classes, walking clubs, and youth recreational activities such as soccer, basketball or volleyball.



Cooking and nutrition classes provide residents with healthy options and alternatives.

These and a variety of additional health education and fitness programming are currently being provided under the Healthy Pueblo Wellness Initiative. As the effort continues, Urban Strategies will share outcomes, strategies and lessons learned for creating a healthy living environment and healthy programming for residents in revitalized mixed-income communities.



Pueblo del Sol youth actively participate in community sports and recreational activities around the site.

