

## **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Awards \$75,000 Grants to Four Local Not-for-Profits to Advance Health and Nutrition in the State**

### **Grants celebrate Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts' 75 years of commitment to the community**

**BOSTON — September 10, 2012** — To recognize Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts' (BCBSMA) 75th anniversary today, four local not-for-profits each received a \$75,000 grant to promote nutrition education and access to healthy foods. The BCBSMA 75th Anniversary Grants were awarded to the Urban Food Initiative; Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council; Project Bread in partnership with Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc.; and Boston Natural Areas Network.

"For 75 years, Blue Cross has maintained a deep commitment to improving health outcomes and the quality of life for residents of the Commonwealth," said Andrew Dreyfus, President and CEO of BCBSMA. "Many families continue to face financial hardship as a result of the economic downturn. With growing demand and shrinking resources, the safety-net services they turn to are severely strained. The BCBSMA 75th Anniversary Grants will help advance critical programs in the communities at greatest risk."

The four not-for-profit organizations were selected after a competitive process challenging them to develop programs to improve the lives of struggling families with children school-aged or younger in Massachusetts. Each organization takes a unique approach to advancing the health and nutrition of families facing economic hardship throughout the state.

#### **Boston Natural Areas Network**

Dorchester and residents of other neighborhoods underserved by community gardens will have greater access to fresh, affordable produce as Boston Natural Areas Network increases and improves the number and condition of urban gardens in Boston. Community gardens will become neighborhood hubs of healthy living with workshops and programs on cooking, good nutrition, exercise and sustainable gardening.

"This important grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts enables us to expand community gardening in Boston," said Valerie Burns, President of Boston Natural Areas Network. "We can now engage even more people in the shared purpose of growing fresh local food, being physically active and building stronger, healthier neighborhoods."

#### **Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council**

The Council will implement a comprehensive nutrition education program geared towards influencing the eating habits of nearly two-hundred kindergarten students and their families located in three critical need elementary schools in Holyoke. The program provides education about eating and growing fresh produce, and includes field trips to local area farms.

"Blue Cross' support makes the Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative possible," said Anne Cody, Kindergarten Initiative Coordinator for the Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council. "Here in Holyoke there is a large Latino population with strong preferences for culturally-familiar produce. Thanks to Blue Cross we can tie the students' cultural backgrounds to local farming and healthy eating, which is an excellent approach to real and meaningful dietary preferences. We can't thank Blue Cross enough for making the Holyoke Kindergarten Initiative a full, delicious adventure in local food and farming—kids learn better when they eat better!"

#### **Project Bread in partnership with Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc.**

In partnership with Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc., Project Bread will improve the quality of meals served to children attending the Head Start program. Kids and their families will benefit from nutrition education, local shopping trips, cooking lessons, and access to healthy food options. The program seeks to create a replicable model that will transform the eating experiences of Head Start children both in the program and at home.

"We're pleased to partner with the Lynn Economic Opportunity Head Start program to introduce young children and their parents to healthy eating in an appealing and affordable way by bringing a trained culinary chef into the program," said Ellen Parker, Executive Director of Project Bread. "This generous grant from Blue Cross helps us extend the successful work we've done in low-income schools to some of the youngest and most vulnerable children in the state."

### **Urban Food Initiative**

By partnering with local grocery stores, the Urban Food Initiative will offer high quality food at a fraction of typical prices at neighborhood retail stores in the City of Boston—providing economic relief for Massachusetts families. In addition to providing access to more affordable food, the organization will create new jobs for local residents.

"Affordability of nutritious food is one of the primary obstacles in combating hunger and obesity today," said Doug Rauch, Founder of the Urban Food Initiative. "By partnering with local grocery stores, restaurants and growers, we will offer nutritious foods at up to 60% off through Urban Food Initiative neighborhood stores in the City of Boston—providing both economic and nutritional benefits to area families. The Urban Food Initiative is honored and grateful to receive this support from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts."

### **Recent Community Commitment Highlights**

As the largest community-focused, taxpaying, not-for-profit health plan in Massachusetts, BCBSMA is committed to serving with its community partners to improve the communities its members call home. A recent press release issued by the Massachusetts Office of Attorney General reports that six Massachusetts HMOs—including Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts—provided more than \$143 million in community benefits for Massachusetts residents in Fiscal Year 2011.

Additionally, a new BCBSMA 2011 Corporate Citizenship Report highlights other measurable and sustainable benefits the company's community and economic contribution strategies are having throughout the Commonwealth. Highlights include:

- More than **\$1.6 billion contributed** to the Massachusetts economy.
- More than **\$218 million in total revenue** for the state government in taxes, assessments and fees. In addition to state and municipal taxes and assessments, BCBSMA also paid \$36.9 million in federal taxes last year.
- **\$5.1 million in philanthropic contributions** to more than 500 nonprofit organizations, including food banks/pantries, youth and social services organizations, etc. to enrich the lives and neighborhoods of Massachusetts residents.

### **About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts**

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ([www.bluecrossma.com](http://www.bluecrossma.com)) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. Celebrating our 75th anniversary in 2012, we are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Visit BlueCrew @ Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts on Facebook.

### **About Boston Natural Areas Network**

Boston Natural Areas Network (<http://www.bostonnatural.org>) has over thirty years of experience in the protection, creation, and management of community gardens in Boston's poorest and most densely built neighborhoods. BNAN provides support to over 170 community and school gardens, 59 of which are owned

by BNAN. These 172 community gardens contain more than 3,500 garden plots that provide healthy food and recreation to more than 17,000 residents.

### **About Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council**

Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council (<http://holyokefoodandfitness.org>) promotes community empowerment for social change by influencing program and policy outcomes around health and wellness, food systems, and the built environment. The mission of the HFFPC is to create and sustain a more healthy and vibrant Holyoke through the development of programs, policies, community leaders and advocacy.

### **About Project Bread**


As the state's leading antihunger organization, Project Bread ([www.projectbread.org](http://www.projectbread.org)) is dedicated to alleviating, preventing, and ultimately ending hunger in Massachusetts. Through The Walk for Hunger, the oldest continual pledge walk in the country, and other sources, Project Bread provides millions of dollars each year in privately donated funds to support hunger relief through emergency programs, schools, Head Start programs, community health centers, farmers' markets, community suppers, home care organizations, and other programs that protect the individual and strengthen our community food security.

### **About Urban Food Initiative**

The Urban Food Initiative (UFI) is a new retail grocery / foodservice model offering food items at a fraction of typical prices, through small-scale, community-based neighborhood retail stores, stocked with high quality, nutritious food products secured primarily through supermarket partnerships. The UFI model advances the health and nutrition of families, and especially families of small children, by offering customers in low-income communities a previously unprecedented combination of nutrition, access, and affordability.

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