

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Project Bread and Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc. Celebrate Chefs in Head Start Program

Area legislators and funders see how Project Bread's Chefs in Head Start Program is changing the way low-income children and their parents think about healthy food

BOSTON, MA — May 17, 2013 — Project Bread, Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc. (LEO), and elected officials gathered yesterday to thank Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) for investing in the health of 400 low-income children and their families attending the Lynn Head Start Program, hosted by LEO.

Funding for the program not only impacts the students and their families, but includes the design of the food education curriculum, recipes for the menus and parent workshops, the bags of food parents receive with the ingredients of the meals prepared during cooking workshops, and the development of a English/Spanish recipe book parents will receive at the end of the year with tips on eating healthy on a budget.

At the showcase event, Project Bread's Executive Director, Ellen Parker, and LEO's Nutrition Director, Marilyn Perry, presented BCBSMA's Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Timothy J. O'Brien, with a plaque celebrating the health insurer's support of a new kind of hunger relief and education program called Chefs in Head Start.

The program places Project Bread's Chef Educator, Vanessa LaBranche, in the Head Start kitchen and classrooms to capture the imagination and taste buds of young children before they form preferences for foods high in sugar, fat, and sodium.

By using a three-pronged approach, LaBranche demonstrates that children can learn to eat nutritious food through the school's new healthy menu, through classroom activities that expose them to new fruits and vegetables, and through hands-on cooking demonstrations that teach their parents how to make the dishes on a budget.

The event, which provided a demonstration of LaBranche's techniques, was attended by area legislators, including Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy, State Representative Lori A. Ehrlich, and State Representative Donald H. Wong, as well as representatives from the offices of Senator Thomas M. McGee, State Representative Robert F. Fennell and Congressman John F. Tierney, all of whom expressed their support of the program.

"Blue Cross is committed to improving the health and quality of life of communities throughout Massachusetts," said Tim O'Brien of BCBSMA as he accepted the award. "In recognition of our 75th anniversary last year, we provided a \$75,000 grant to four local not-for-profits, including Project Bread in partnership with LEO to address nutrition with young children. As a representative of Blue Cross and a proud board member of Project Bread, it is great to see how this thoughtful and creative program is making a difference in this community by teaching the staff, children and their parents about nutrition and access to healthy foods, while also helping to solve hunger."

In collaboration with Marilyn Perry, the LEO nutrition director, LaBranche engages parents in culinary workshops while incorporating financial planning into healthy lifestyle choices. Of the nearly 400 children and families served by the Head Start program, 90 percent live below the poverty line—making these very young children among the most vulnerable populations because they are still developing and are not yet supported by school meals. Through educational nutrition activities and by introducing new food choices in a fun creative way, Chefs in Head Start interrupts the hunger crisis by promoting a healthy lifestyle at a young age.

"For Project Bread, the opposite of hungry isn't 'full,'" said Ellen Parker, executive director of Project Bread. "It's being *healthy*, and these students deserve the best chance we can give them to learn and thrive. We appreciate the opportunity to partner with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and LEO. This pilot program works beautifully and we'd like to bring it to scale around the state."

"I want to thank everyone for supporting this very important program in the city of Lynn," said Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy. "On the behalf of the citizens of Lynn - thank you to Project Bread, LEO and Blue Cross for taking initiative in providing a healthy education. A better eating Lynn is a healthier Lynn."

As the largest community-focused, taxpaying, not-for-profit health plan in Massachusetts, BCBSMA has a strong commitment to the community. In 2012 alone, more than 26,600 service hours were completed by BCBSMA associates. Additionally, the company contributed more than \$1.6 billion to the Massachusetts economy and provided \$5.1 million in philanthropic contributions to more than 500 nonprofit organizations.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (<http://www.bluecrossma.com>) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. 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 or our annual Corporate Citizenship Report to learn more about our Corporate Citizenship efforts.

About Project Bread

Project Bread is the only statewide antihunger organization committed to providing people of all ages, cultures, and walks of life with sustainable, reliable access to nutritious food. From community-based meal programs, to early childhood and school nutrition initiatives, to improved access to farm-to-table resources, Project Bread approaches hunger as a complex problem with multiple solutions. With funds raised through The Walk for Hunger, the oldest continual pledge walk in the country, and other sources, Project Bread pioneers innovative initiatives and supports effective programs to eradicate hunger in our state. For more information, visit www.projectbread.org, www.facebook.com/projectbread, or www.twitter.com/walkforhunger.

About LEO

Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc. (LEO)'s mission as a Lynn anti-poverty agency, is to alleviate the immediate effects of poverty in the Lynn area while striving to eliminate its root causes, and thereby improve the quality of life for all residents of the Lynn area. LEO is home to the Lynn Head Start program, which serves 400 very young children from ages 2 - 5 years of age.

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