

Community Day at UROC highlights several area organizations

Written by Ivan Phifer

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The University of Minnesota Urban Research Outreach and Engagement Center (UROC), hosted a community day this past month at its facility at 2001 Plymouth Ave. N.

The event included ethnic food, and organizations related to the University of Minnesota to showcase services. "Sharing the Journey," the theme for Community Day 2012, celebrated community partnerships and urban research initiatives.

A highlight this year was a tribute to University of Minnesota senior vice president of academic administration, Robert Jones, who was instrumental in the creation of UROC. He recently accepted the position of president of the University at Albany, part of the State University of New York system.

Community Day offered a chance for the public to tour UROC's 22,000-square-foot facility and review university and community collaborations aimed at strengthening health, education and economic development in North Minneapolis and other urban communities. Activities included free computer classes and health screenings, healthy cooking demonstrations, live music, and a public reception.

Joe Hetler, community network director for the Center for Personalized Prevention Research (CPPR), helps children and families with mental health issues.

"We are not a service provider organization, we build research partnerships," Hetler said.

One of the Northside research partnerships is with Reuben Lindh Family Services, who is working with CPPR to implement an evidence-based parenting program for mothers of children in child protection. "The idea is to help them do the very best parenting work that is possible to meet the needs of the family," said Hetler.

The Center for Health Equity (CHE) is another university program that promotes health equity in the community and support equity research on the university campus. "We target under-represented undergraduate students as well as medical and doctorate students to bring into the research pipeline," said Amy Shanafelt, program assistant of CHE.

Shanafelt said the center was established in 2009 by the National Institute of Health. CHE is also a program of the Clinical Translation Science Institute.

The partners who assisted in this initiative include the Stairstep Foundation and the Wellshare International Organization. These partners work with Somali youth on initiatives such as smoking prevention and health promotion in the African-American community through Stairstep. Stairstep has begun working with churches to increase vegetable intake among African-Americans.

Another group represented at the UROC event was the Urban Garden Youth Employment, a program where youth are taught gardening and agricultural skills, which are then applied to a business setting.

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“They (area youth) maintain a garden for 12 weeks and all the produce grown for the first half of the summer is sold to chefs in the metro area,” said youth coordinator, Xavier Porter.

The youth of the garden program also do market research through research and field trips.

“The first few weeks of the program we educate youth on gardening skills, and learn to make enough produce for profit after deliveries,” said Porter. “I’ll take them to a farmer’s market, and they meet wholesalers to investigate how much to sell produce at, how many pounds and when.”

Urban Garden works with non-profit organizations that provide the youth for the program.

For more information on these and other university programs, contact the Urban Research & Engagement Center at (612) 626-8762 or visit www.uroc.umn.edu .