

Agency Highlight

Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles



Keeping the Community in Corner Store Health Retail Transformation

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SEE-LA provides services to SNAP-Ed eligible families in Service Planning Area 6, particularly Watts and South Los Angeles. These communities have among the highest rates of adult and childhood obesity in Los Angeles County, significant unmet health needs and limited resources to support healthy lifestyles. They also face barriers to healthy living due to social and environmental factors such as lack of healthy retail food outlets coupled with a high concentration of fast-food restaurants and liquor stores. With demonstrated past success in healthy retail interventions, SEE-LA moved to duplicate its success through more expansive retail interventions at Central Store in the Watts community and Azteca 99cents Plus store in South Central.

These stores were selected to compliment direct education efforts in surrounding schools and SEE-LA's Central Avenue Farmers' Market and MLK Campus Farmer's Market. The close proximity of nutrition education classes to each corner store has strengthened community support and feedback throughout the intervention process. Central Store, a healthy retail partner in previous SNAP-Ed funding cycles, had achieved great success through multiple marketing interventions and leveraging partnerships with the Los Angeles Food Policy Council's Healthy Neighborhood Market Network and Los Angeles Department of Public Health to provide technical assistance and training to the store owner and staff. Notably one of the greatest contributions to successful interventions at Central store was by way of ongoing community engagement and feedback. At the close of FY16-17 Central store had doubled its provision of fresh produce to the community from \$600 per week to \$1200 per week!

Building on effective intervention practices, SEE-LA engaged Central Store to continue its partnership in enhancing healthy food options and marketing practices as well as to participate in the California Department of Public Health's Healthy Retail Recognition Pilot Program, *Shop Healthy Here*. With the innovative assistance of a USC intern, the Central Store piloted a "Healthy Meal Deal". To begin, community members participated in a sticker survey to elicit feedback on what items store patrons would like to purchase in their meal deal. Based on survey results, a meal deal was created which included a healthy meat or vegetable torta, 12oz cut of fresh cut fruit, and water or agua fresca. SEE-LA staff and the USC intern then worked with the store owner to effectively price the deal and trained store staff to promote the meal deal with customer prompts and signage. More than 20 healthy meal deals were sold in the first week and due to ongoing success since its debut in February 2017, the store continues to offer and promote this healthy option.

Furthermore, via the *Shop Healthy Here* program, Central Store has been able to promote itself and gain official recognition within the community as a healthy food hotspot. The pilot also affords the unique opportunity to provide a small refrigerator and freezer to enable the Central Store to boost its inventory and sale of more healthy food items.

Azteca 99cents Plus store was approached in April 2017 to partner with SEE-LA. The store owner showed great enthusiasm for serving and meeting the needs of his community and had partnered with schools in the past to allow store educational tours. A visual and CX3 assessment were conducted where areas for interventions were identified. One immediate observation provided by SEE-LA staff was that the store has a very robust produce area yet due to the location, it can easily be overlooked upon entrance and even while shopping within the store. Also, the first impression when walking in the store is the sight of numerous racks of chips and sugar sweetened beverages. In discussion with the owner to consider enhancing the visibility of his produce by



Image 1. Pre-intervention storefront.

bringing these items to the front and moving unhealthy items to the back, it was made clear that the owner did not have buy-in for interventions that would require rearranging store items. His focus was to cater to the need for customers in a rush and wanting to grab a quick snack. Despite this, he was on board with many of the other intervention suggestions.



Image 2. Indoor signage guiding store patrons to the produce section.

SEE-LA began working collaboratively to provide signage, Champions for Change and Rethink Your Drink banners, and visual enhancements to promote his produce area, WIC section, and healthy beverages. The store also agreed to be part of the *Shop Healthy Here* state pilot program. We used this opportunity to host our first promotional event at the store on June 28th. The key focus of the event was to promote the store's recognition as a *Shop Healthy Here* store as well as showcase produce with recipe sampling using only store produce and ingredients. During the event, we elicited feedback from store patrons gathering spending data, demographic data and input into their vision of a healthy store and what Azteca could do to provide that. The results demonstrated that store patrons wanted more varieties of fruits and vegetables and it became evident that many people were not aware that the store had a produce section. In addition, in their vision of a healthy store- the majority stated they would like to see the fruit and vegetables in the front of the store and the chips, cookies, and sodas in the back. It's important to note here that suggestions provided were authentic and SEE-LA staff ensured questions were open ended and answers were not coerced in any way to ensure results were valid.

At the close of the event, all results were shared and discussed with the store owner. The win here was that previously the store owner was resistant to moving his sugary drinks and chips out from the front of the store because he wanted these things left for convenience of his shoppers who are in and out. However, once he saw the survey, he took a picture and said he was going to work on these things because he can see it is what the customers want. SEE-LA is currently working with the store to establish a plan to address customer suggestions. Impressively, simply by hosting the event and increasing awareness of his produce section, the store owner has noted a near doubling of produce sales.

With ongoing partnership with the Azteca 99cents Plus Store, SEE-LA was able to develop and provide storefront signage that boasts the sale of fresh produce within the store. Additionally, inside the store, an attractive hanging sign and floor decal were placed to guide customers to the produce section. The store owner was included throughout the design process and very satisfied with the results. He reports that the increased awareness has further increased his sale of produce. He is now purchasing \$1,200 worth of produce weekly vs his previous \$800 per week!



Image 3, 4. Storefront After with new signage.