



Nadea Choudhury, 19, is one of 15 Bronx-area teens taking part in Learn it, Grow it, Eat it Youthmarket, a GrowNYC

program that encourages healthy cooking and eating.

Healthy ambition

Youth program brings farm to city

BY EMILY NGO
Special to Newsday

Ashley Flores, 18, admits to bad eating habits. She likes pizza, McDonald's fast food and sometimes drinks four sodas a day.

Yet she stood yesterday be-

hind a table of locally grown produce that included kale, beets and apples, excitedly hawking them to customers and preaching their nutritional benefits.

"It's hard [to eat well] because I've been unhealthy-eating all my life," said

Flores, one of 15 paid interns managing a GrowNYC Youthmarket farm stand in the Bronx's Morrisiana neighborhood. "Going to the supermarket is expensive, but you can go to the corner store and get candy for \$1."

Intern Charisma Whaley,

17, agreed that fresh, affordable produce is hard to come by in the area. "You might find a banana, but it's already rotten," she said.

Limited access to fruits and vegetables is among the reasons Morrisiana and other "food deserts" have high rates of obesity and diabetes, according to GrowNYC, a nonprofit environmental group. In the South Bronx, two in three adults are overweight or obese, according to a report by the city health department.

The weekly Learn It, Grow It, Eat It Youthmarket, which opened yesterday and will run on Wednesdays through October, seeks to change attitudes about eating.

It may be working for Flores, who said she had acquired a taste for carrots. "They're getting in my system," she said.

The farm stand, one of 12

by Youthmarkets throughout New York City, accepts government programs such as EBT, WIC and Health Bucks to encourage shopping by low-income families.

The interns will also be growing the fruits and vegetables at community gardens, teaching children about healthy eating and building benches for neighborhood groups. Of all their tasks, the interns "really like" the market because that's where it all comes together for them," said David Saphire, project coordinator for Learn It, Grow It, Eat It. "They see that people are interested."

At the farm stand yesterday, the interns gave presentations about the large amount of sugar in soda and other beverages and cooking demonstrations on how to prepare vegetables. By the end of the day,

the Youthmarket farm stand sold out of its produce.

Hassaballah Yaya, 18, did such a good job sautéing kale, chard and carrots for customers to sample that he convinced Roscoe Escalera, of Morrisiana, to buy produce to cook at home.

The youngsters are good inspiration and the farm stand prices decent, Escalera said.

Intern Desiree Zayas, 19, said she hoped to improve people's health by encouraging better eating. Many of her family members have diabetes, and Zayas, who has asthma, was to be tested for diabetes late yesterday.

"I do this so I can eat healthier and I can lose weight," Zayas said. "I like to inspire and I like to help people. I do this so maybe my little brother can see. He's 10."