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Market Makeover: Euclid Market Transformation

[Shirley Ramirez](#)



[Public Matters' Market Makeover](#) is a comprehensive strategy for addressing the "grocery gap" in "food deserts," areas that have limited access to quality, healthy food; an overabundance of fast food; and alarmingly high rates of chronic conditions related to poor diet.

My name is Shirley Ramirez. I'm nineteen years old. I live in the dominant Latin community of East Los Angeles. Currently, I'm a sophomore at East Los Angeles Community College and in the process of transferring out. Once I transfer out, I am planning to study public health due to my experience in working with Public Matters and Proyecto MercadoFRESCO. I started working Public Matters during my junior year of high school in East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy (ELARA). Back then I knew nothing about health. All I knew was that my daily habit of eating my Hot Cheetos smothered in hot, gooey and sticky nacho cheese was probably going to change.

Through Public Matters and our project with UCLA CPHHD, nutritionists and dietitians came into my classroom to teach us about what eating healthy really meant. I found out that the correct portion of how much meat you should eat should be the size of your palm. That was a shock because, normally I would eat twice the size of that in a meal with sides of refried beans and rice. The dietician also helped us make "Tampico" juice, which I found out that actually had no juice. While making it, it felt more like working in a chemistry lab instead of a kitchen.



Shirley holding up a sign proclaiming "My Grandpa Has Diabetes" for the video "Have You Noticed How Much Junk Food We Eat?" 2011.

With this information I would go to my *padrinos'* house where their normal meal was three pieces of meat the size of a full grown adult hand, with sides consisting of beans, rice, salsa, guacamole and a stack of tortillas. One of my *padrinos* is obese and is barely able to walk. Most of the time he is either sitting or sleeping. He can't stand for too long because his body can't take his weight. He has three daughters and six granddaughters that he has to look after. Seeing him suffer and seeing that all of it could've been prevented with better awareness about nutrition and diet saddens me. A *padrino* is someone who has helped a family in a time of difficulty. His whole family has been there for mine for over a decade. They're practically our family. We spend a lot of time with them. Situations like this aren't just happening to my family; they're happening to most families in East Los Angeles. One of the main reasons is because of the lack of availability of fresh produce.



Euclid Market as it looked prior to the store's transformation.



Euclid Market getting ready for the grand reopening Saturday December 14, 2013.

It's not that we don't have supermarkets available. We do. It's the fact that most people in my community don't have a car and the supermarket is a mile or more away. Once you are able to go

into a supermarket, it's not even the freshest produce that you can get. I get lucky if I can find a pomegranate that is ripe, un-bruised, and juicy. This is common in all East Los Angeles supermarkets. If you go to Monterey Park and walk into a Ralph's you can find the juiciest apples, the orangest oranges. In Alhambra, there's Fresh & Easy and Trader Joe's, with even better produce. East Los Angeles is surrounded by locations with better access than us. Why can't we have the same options as they do?



Along with ELARA classmate Lilita Guizer Serrano, Shirley leading a cooking demo at Yash La Casa Market, January 2012.

All this information was really brought to my attention by working with Public Matters. I was able to go to different places in my community and around Los Angeles and speak to different audiences about my experience of living in East Los Angeles. While being able to do that I was also able to work on two Proyecto MercadoFRESCO Market Makeover projects in East Los Angeles, helping transform two corner stores into markets into healthy food outlets and places you wanted to shop. It's one thing to talk to people about eating healthy, but that won't do any good if there's nothing for them to be able to buy.



Shirley Ramirez in 2010 as a High School Junior at the East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy and as a Proyecto MercadoFRESCO Community Liaison in 2013.

This past summer, after Public Matters received an LA2050 award from the Goldhirsh Foundation, they called and offered me a job to help makeover two other corner stores in Boyle Heights with some of my peers of ELARA and some new people from Roosevelt High School. We also would be responsible for working with the community to talk to them about healthy behaviors, do social marketing and get customers to the stores. Our new titles, with our job, would be Community Liaisons.

There has always been a type of rivalry between East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. The Community Liaisons come from both communities. As we all got to hear each other's stories, I was able to see how we all had lived with similar consequences of the lack of good quality produce. It impacted me to hear how many people were suffering. It wasn't just the people that were close to me.

One of the two Boyle Heights markets I, along with the other Community Liaisons, have worked on is Euclid Market. It's about to have its grand reopening on Saturday, December 14. Euclid is the biggest market any of us has worked on. Walking in, we were immediately alarmed and put to halt. Right in front of the entrance there was a literal wall of chips. As you maneuvered your way around the wall of chips, you were then bombarded with different shelving units with random, dispersed items like cereal placed next to toilet paper because, obviously, you need one with the other. The store needless to say, was a mess, that being an understatement. On the back wall a giant sign said "Fruits & Vegetables," so logically as a Community Liaison I went on a hunt for the fruits and vegetables and it was like playing a game of Where's Waldo. We eventually did find the fruits and vegetables in the back of the store, again randomly dispersed, a pile of bananas on top of a box and some tomatoes in the fridge. We knew that a long hot summer was ahead of us.



Where's Waldo? Euclid Market's Fruit and Vegetable Sign prior to the store transformation.

And so, we worked. We started by planning with Nathan Cheng to figure out the layout for the store and what produce we wanted there to be available. We drew out and planned out how Euclid was already laid out and took inventory of all of the random products it had. We then started to visualize what we wanted the store to look like, not only in the floor plan but also on the outside and inside. Then we started working in the store. We started out by taking off the shelves. We cleaned them, sanded them, painted them, and then reinstalled them back into them into longer, more customer-friendly rows. The store already seemed more inviting. We then moved onto painting, which is the hardest part for someone who has a fidgety hand, which was most of us except of course all of us except for Mike and Reanne from Public Matters and Miriam, one of the Community Liaisons. Before the project, I thought that painting was just painting. Brush or roller didn't matter. It really does, and even in a big store you can tell where someone didn't paint it right. We would have to get on top of the refrigeration units so that we would be able to get the top corners of the stores. We painted and painted inside the store until it was as close to perfect as we could get it to be. Even as we were painting the walls of the stores, we were reorganizing and reorganizing the shelving units and the products that it contained. It's interesting how the organization of a store works and how important it is. We've learned about how a person's mind works as he or she is walking down the aisle to buy something. Euclid also has a Carniceria and that's what brought most of the customers in. In order for the customers to buy more than just meat, we put the produce case right in the front entrance by meat counter. So that it'll be the first thing that people see and as they pass by to initially buy meat they'll end up seeing the beautiful produce and buy it.



Transforming the interior of Euclid Market.



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Working on the inside of the store was the hardest part because Euclid Market is so humongous, it's not the average size of a corner store, it seems like the size of a Payless Shoe Store. So with the inside done, we had to paint the outside. The market is located in between a \$.99 store and a house, and right by the Casa Del Mexicana. The original color of the store was boring beige. We wanted to make sure that the store was going to be able to be eye catching. If the market stayed boring beige, no one would go and visit it. It wouldn't be appealing to the eye, you'd just brush it off. With a vivid color, it'd make people curious and be more willing to check it out, even just to get a closer look. So now, Euclid is a lovely deep blue base highlighted by giant silhouettes of some of the things it sells: water, meat, dairy, and, of course, produce.

A lot of the outside painting was done by some of the students from Roosevelt High School who are in Mr. Lopez's Food Justice class. It's funny to see them and realize that I started off just like them, with little knowledge of the food injustice of communities suffer from, and yet excited to do something about it. It's come to a full circle in a way. I get to help them and educate them the way Mike and Reanne taught us. It's also interesting to lead someone that has no knowledge of something I'm now passionate about. I need to pass on my passion to them because if the passion just stays with me, then I'm the only one trying to make a change. But by teaching them and getting them passionate about Food Justice and transforming the markets, then we can really all make a change in our community. It's a lot different than just eating hot, gooey and sticky nacho cheese on top of Flaming Hot's all the time.

Euclid Market's Grand Re-Opening is Saturday, December 14 from noon-2:00 pm. The store is at 545 Euclid Ave. and 6th. Come and [join us](#) to see the fresh produce that will now be provided to the Boyle Heights community! There will be mariachis, free food, community groups, and a lot of fun surprises.

Top Image: Community Liaison Shirley hand-painting a sign for Sociedad Market, August 2013.