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Morgan Stanley hopes Newark program improves kids' wellness

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By [Beth Fitzgerald](#)

Kids need nutritious food, exercise and medical care to build a childhood foundation of good health. Now, a Newark pilot program launched this summer by Morgan Stanley hopes to impact the health of inner-city youngsters by creating the kind of wellness environment that many suburban communities take for granted.



Joan Steinberg at work in Newark.

Joan Steinberg, global head of philanthropy at Morgan Stanley, said Healthy Newark is a collaboration between Morgan Stanley and several community-based partners, including the

Community Food Bank of New Jersey and Newark Beth Israel Medical Center. A \$500,000 grant from Morgan Stanley is funding healthy food that the food bank uses at its eight “Kids Café” programs, which serve meals to Newark children during the summer and after school.

The grant also funds a Newark Beth Israel program of nutrition education at the Kids Cafés, where the youngsters also will receive preventive health screening. And the children will be taken on field trips to see how fruits and vegetables are grown at the America’s Grow-A-Row farm in Pittstown. Finally, more than 150 Morgan Stanley employees built a playground in Newark in June and will build a second one next summer.



Morgan Stanley volunteers in Newark.

“What we are attempting to do is combine nutrition and wellness education and health screenings with healthy foods, and then also provide safe places to play,” Steinberg said. “We’re trying to see if we can move the needle on kid’s health if you start pulling these things together.”

The goal is to help as many as 3,000 Newark children and their families.

Steinberg said it’s not enough to teach families about good nutrition if “vegetables are not available or they can’t afford them or they have no access to them.” The hope is that by serving healthy foods to kids at the Kids Café — along with providing nutrition education, health screenings and access to a playground where they can exercise — the program can begin to change behavior.

“Will families be able to implement the healthy lifestyle changes more quickly and more readily when this is right in front of them and they have safe places to play and exercise?” she said. “We’re trying to see what the collective impact would be if you start delivering the programs in tandem with each other.”

The goal is also to involve Morgan Stanley employees as volunteers; not only did they build the playground, employees will be visiting the Grow-A-Row farm to harvest produce for the food bank to serve to Newark children.



U.S. Rep. Donald Payne, Jr., and Wesley Jenkins.

Morgan Stanley is also piloting the program in Chicago and in Oakland, California.

“It’s a pilot and we want to know what works and what does not,” Steinberg said. “The goal here really is to give kids a healthy start. So if the program is not improving the kids’ health prospects, we will keep tweaking the model.”

Steinberg said healthy food, nutrition education, medical care and exercise “are the fundamental building block of childhood health. This is pretty basic, but in a lot of poor communities, kids don’t have these things. We are trying to provide all of them, and by providing them together and integrating them we are hoping that we can tick the needle a little bit and actually see measureable results in the ways that families approach health.”

Morgan Stanley has more than 1,500 employees in New Jersey, and the company said its charitable giving in New Jersey in 2013 totaled \$2.6 million, including employee donations.

Steinberg said that, when you are trying to create healthy eating habits in children: “It is not okay to just hand them an apple and walk away. We have to hand them the apple repeatedly and make sure they know they have to eat the apple. And then make sure they have good places to exercise and burn off the apple. It is all about