If you haven't listened to "Hot Cheetos and Takis," the hit song and viral video by North Minneapolis sensation, Y.N. Richkids, you are missing out on perhaps one of the greatest musical acts to come out of North since Prince

Pictured: Michelle Horovitz, Latasha Powell, Deedra Porter and Princess Titus

The video has received well over one million views on YouTube ever since multiple national press outlets picked up the story of the youth, who are a part of Beat and Rhymes, a project by the Nellie Stone Johnson School and the North Community YMCA. While the song is catchy and the youth extremely talented, many have commented on how the piece shines a light on the health disparities and lack of access to healthy foods in North Minneapolis. This is a very real problem in our community, but there are several organizations and individuals working to change this. Over the next month, I will highlight the outstanding non-profits and for-profits working to address local health disparities and the huge opportunity that exists for businesses to address this market failure and make a substantial profit.

Appetite for Change (AFC) is working to call attention to these nutrition issues. The North Minneapolis based social enterprise is dedicated to using the growing and cooking of healthy foods as a tool to build health and wealth in low-income areas and communities of color. AFC works with residents to build strong families and healthy communities around food.

Michelle Horovitz, AFC founder and a former chef and public defender with long-standing family roots in North Minneapolis, started AFC because she believes food can be a powerful tool to build health, wealth and promote positive change in the community.

"I believe that when families reclaim the kitchen as a place to bond with and educate their children, then communities become stronger and more able to deal with the struggles of daily life," said Horovitz. "Bringing people together around food is one way to build capacity for creating social, racial and economic justice and bettering communities."

Horovitz's grandparents immigrated to North Minneapolis from Romania and Hungry. Her family, like many Jewish families in North Minneapolis at the time, was living in poverty; socially isolated and economically excluded because of its differences. This family history shaped Horovitz's worldview, pushing her to fight for social and racial equality.

"I was taught that the Holocaust could happen again and all minorities are vulnerable to those who don't know or understand their differences," said Horovitz.

Working as a public defender in Miami-Dade County (Fla.) after law school gave Horovitz a closer look at the injustices in the criminal justice system and our food systems. Having a passion for food, Horovitz later became a trained chef. She worked for a James Beard Award-winning chef, but was eventually pulled into the nonprofit world to combine her passions for social justice and food. Horovitz began to work for a national organization dedicated to food justice and education. Eventually she moved back to Minneapolis to raise her family and started AFC.

AFC focuses its work on initiatives that resemble intensified versions of your standard community garden, cooking club, food education and access programs with a triple bottom line – food justice, economic justice and increased social capital. AFC programs are empowering Northside Residents to advocate for the food they want in their community.

"There is a lot of inertia around growing food and people advocating for healthy foods, said Horovitz. "People used to feel like they didn't have a choice and that it was hard to change their situation, but now they are starting to think about the power they have."

Community Cooks is starting up again this fall. It's the series of hands-on cooking workshops where community members come together to prepare a culturally relevant and healthy meal, followed by community-led, small-group conversations about food-related issues. The project was successful in its first round, with more than 100 families and 230 individuals involved.

"Participants are also given opportunities to connect with community-based resources for healthy food as well as tangible cooking and nutrition materials or equipment," said Horovitz. "All of the details of these workshops are determined by the community – the content of the dialogues, the food we cook, and the strategies for connecting participants to resources." Community Cooks 2.0 is planning to double in size. Goals of the program include food education, sharing cooking techniques and recipes as well as sending families home with bulk amounts of food. People enjoyed the program because it was an opportunity to be part of a cooking club and meet other families living in their neighborhood.

If you are a Jordan neighborhood resident, you may have noticed the community garden on the corner of 26th Ave. N and Knox Ave. N in Minneapolis. Through a partnership with Jordan Area Community Council (JACC), AFC installed a flower garden, six raised beds, a compost bin and rain barrels. By next year, AFC plans to expand the community garden and start an intergenerational growing and cooking program with We-Win Institute.

AFC is also partnering with the City of Minneapolis and the West Broadway Business and Area Coalition (WBC) on the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. Together the partnership will work to reposition the 12 Northside corner stores to provide and increase sales of fresh, local, and affordable produce. As corner stores are often under scrutiny for high prices and old produce, the collaboration is working to achieve a win-win for both the community members and business owners by increasing sales while providing a better selection at a lower price. Project elements include enhanced produce displays, increased visibility of healthy foods within the stores and community outreach and marketing around the availability of fresh produce.

Horovitz also contributes and partners with several other organizations working on food justice issues in North, including the West Broadway Farmers Market. She has been at the West Broadway Farmers Market twice this season, first preparing a mouthwatering watermelon salad, and a few weeks later returning to show market-goers how to make chickpea and veggie salad, a dish designed to be perfect for those breaking fast during Ramadan, as well as everyone else.

In her outreach, Horovitz gets a great deal of feedback from the community on what food related businesses people want.

"People want to see more grocery stores with better quality and affordable fresh produce. They want healthy food options for carryout and restaurants and multi-cultural markets. I also hear that people are interested in diverse cultural food options, perhaps a Latin-soul food fusion," said Horovitz. She described the market gap in healthy food choice in North Minneapolis as "the chicken and egg challenge."

The market thinks people only want to eat unhealthy food, but in reality, until we have options, it is difficult to assess what people really want. Horovitz herself admits, "Even though (I don't like to), I find myself eating unhealthy food; my issue being time. There is nowhere to pick up a healthy meal fast. And other people's access issues include transportation, money and time."

When asked about the Y.N. RichKids, Horovitz responded, "The kids are talented and singing about what they know and expressing themselves with what they are familiar with. When you have a neighborhood that is saturated with unhealthy food choices kids are more likely to rap about unhealthy food than fruit and vegetables. It is a dream for kids to rap about fresh produce."

Whether Y.N. RichKids' next song is about Honeycrisp apples and snap peas or not, Horovitz and AFC would like to make sure that all of the young rappers have access to them and an array of healthy foods, at the corner store and beyond.

For more information or to get involved in AFC, contact Michelle Horovitz at michelle@afcmn.org or 612-655-6791.