

A Novel Peer Mentor Model for Nutrition Education Within a Food Pantry

A partnership with Catholic Social Services, PA USA
and the Villanova University Fitzpatrick College of Nursing
MacDonald Center for Obesity Prevention and Education (COPE)

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PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

Disclosures:

- The Author Tracy L Oliver PhD, RDN, LDN has nothing to disclose and has no conflicts of interest.
- Objectives:
 - Identify the valuable role peer mentors may have in delivering nutrition education within a food pantry setting
 - Receive a comprehensive overview of the program development and implementation challenges and successes
 - Learn nutrition education strategies to use when working with a food insecure population
- Funding:
 - Patricia Kind Family Foundation
 - Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia



Background

- **Food insecurity** - the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food – which leads to the need for supplemental food resources, like emergency food pantries.
- **Food pantry**- is a local distribution center in the community where families with food insecurity can go to receive supplemental food.



Background

- **Food pantries** provide an invaluable source of supplemental food, but...
 - Low-income and minority populations experience greater rates of food insecurity → reliance on supplemental food resources → limited food choices including lack of healthy, perishable foods → consumption of larger amounts of added sugar, total fat and less fruits and vegetables → higher rates of chronic disease.



Background-Partnership



- Villanova FCN has a long-standing positive relationship with Catholic Social Services (CSS), Community-Based Program.
- For the past 8 years FCN and CSS have partnered in numerous health promotion/prevention programs for youth, pregnant women, parents, and their families.
- The CSS Norristown site is also home to Martha's Choice Marketplace (MCM) – a food pantry



Problem Statement

- **The Challenge:** food pantries are responsible for addressing both hunger and health and many of these centers are limited in healthy food options.
- **The Need:** to equip patrons of a food pantry with nutrition knowledge and basic cooking skills to optimize healthy eating and health promotion.
- **The Goal:** Our goal for this program was to provide a sustainable model of nutrition education and health promotion in the food pantry setting



Use of Peer Mentors as Nutrition Educators

- Use of *peer educators* in an innovative model of nutrition education
- Why peer educators?
 - Members of local community
 - Share similar cultural beliefs, practices and experiential knowledge
 - Proven to be effective in delivering a variety of health messages
 - Provide support that matches the needs of the recipient because of their perceived credibility and relatability
- Evidence supports the use of peer educators/community health workers
 - Growing evidence indicates that community health workers offering peer support can help individuals meet basic health needs, especially those who are difficult to engage, such as low income, minority or other socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals.



Use of Peer Mentors as Nutrition Educators

- Utilized a “Train-the-trainer” model
 - An interdisciplinary research team of Registered Dietitians, Registered Nurses and Nursing students
 - Provided nutrition education and cooking skills training to the peer mentors
- Incorporation of peer mentors strengthens program sustainability
 - With proper training, peer mentors can continue educating community members beyond the time committed by research team.



Research Questions

- Can peer mentors be taught to effectively teach basic nutrition and cooking skills to fellow patrons in a food pantry?
- Do confidence and self-efficacy increase in peer mentors?
- Can this program be sustainable?
- Can this model ultimately translate to other emergency food settings?



Methods

- A mixed method study design
- Focus groups
 - explored perceived barriers of healthy cooking or eating among those who rely on a food pantry
 - inform the nutrition education program development
- The nutrition education intervention
 - was evaluated for feasibility and retention of utilizing peer mentors to deliver nutrition education in a food pantry



Setting- Target population

Pennsylvania, USA

- 13.72% living in poverty
- 1.7 million people in Pennsylvania are food insecure



Montgomery County

- 2nd most affluent county in the state
- Per capita income of \$40,076
- 80,000 people are food insecure

Norristown

- Per capita income of nearly half, at \$21,609
- 22.3% of households live below poverty line

Pantry population

- 61% receive SNAP benefits
- 83% report that they never have enough money to buy food
- 91.2% report that the monthly food assistance they receive from SNAP lasts less than 3 weeks

Food insecure individuals living in the Norristown, Pennsylvania vicinity who use the Food Pantry



Recruitment-Peer Mentors

- Circulate flyers
- Post signs
- Strong advocates in pantry manager and assistant pantry manager
- Word of mouth
- Application
- Information Session



Recruitment-Peer Mentors

- Leadership qualities
- Friendly
- Believable
- Role model
- Open to new ideas
- Interest in nutrition and healthy lifestyle
- Willing/able to promote health using his/her own style
- Reflects the community
- Connection with community
- Flexibility
- Mode of transportation



Methods- Focus Group

- Peer Mentor Focus Groups
 - 2 focus groups were conducted by trained staff
 - Each 1 hour in length
 - Questions
 - Let's talk about what you would like to get out of this program.
 - This program is about learning about healthy eating and cooking healthier meals.
 - Tell us about your food choices and how you choose what to eat.
 - Is there anything we **shouldn't include** as part of the program?



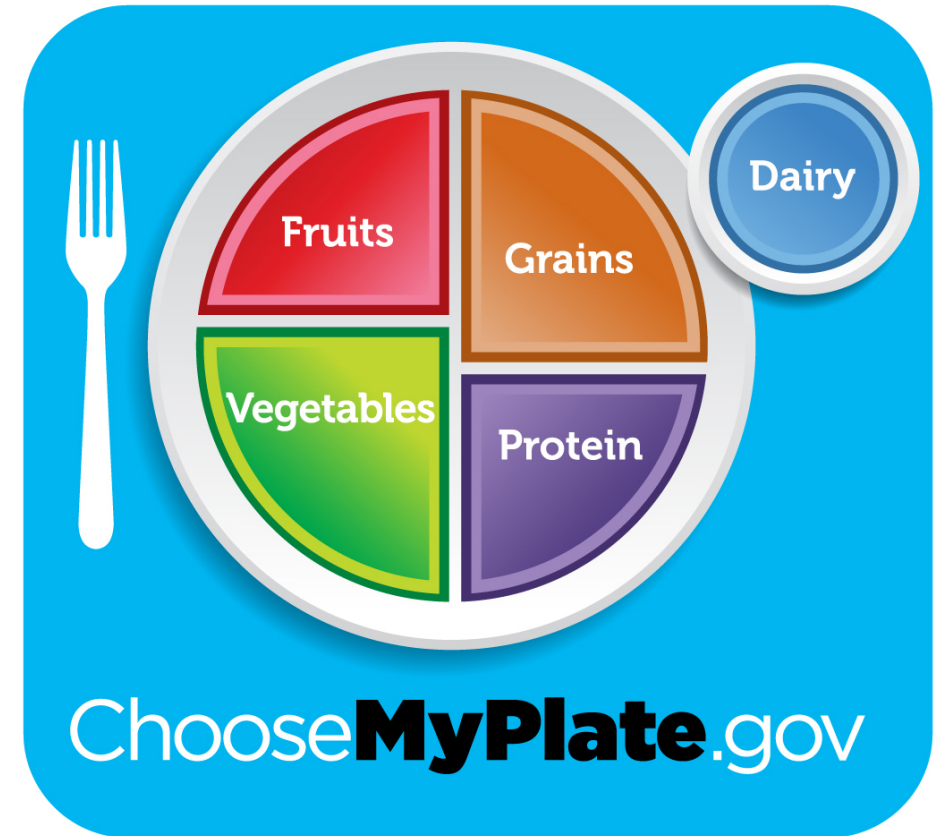
Methods- Intervention Design

- Peer Mentor Training Program
 - 9 mentor “train the trainer” sessions
 - Biweekly
 - Led by study staff
 - 3 Community Workshops
 - One community workshop held after 3 training sessions
 - Led by rotating peer mentor leaders



Methods- Intervention Design

- Lesson of the Day
- Interactive Activity
- MyPlate lesson content
- Healthy Recipe Demonstration
 - Tasting
 - Wrap up



Methods- Intervention Design

- 3 community wide workshops were held
 - Lessons:
 - Segments of session were divided based on comfort level of each peer
 - Sign in table and raffles
 - Sample taste tests
 - Content presenters
 - Recipe demonstration



- Workshops were presented by select peer mentors



Results

- 31 peer mentor applications completed
- 11 peer mentors were selected
 - 7 White
 - 4 Black
- 100% retention of peer mentors over 6 months



Results- Focus Group

- Barriers to healthy eating were:
 - Knowledge on nutrition
 - Resources
 - Special dietary needs
 - Culture and Family



Results-Nutrition Intervention

Program Strengths:

- Feasibility
 - 100% retention rate, highlighting dedication of peer mentors to the program's goals
 - Attendance in majority of training sessions and workshops
- Creation of reproducible protocol that could eventually be used at other emergency food centers
- Sense of pride and accomplishment expressed by the peer mentors
- Friendships formed by peer mentors – in and out of the program
- Recognition of “Community Cooks” Program throughout the food pantry



Results

Program Limitations:

- Limited community attendance during workshops
- Limited influence on food pantry selections available within the marketplace



Future Research

- Equip peer mentors to expand their roles
 - Presence in the parenting classes
 - Expand their role as a lay health promoter
 - Latch onto already running parenting class
 - Enhanced presence in the pantry-more responsibility
 - Conduct food demos
 - Staff nutrition displays
 - Educate on how to use less familiar fruit and vegetables
 - Provide simple meal preparation ideas



Future Implications

Further leverage peer mentors to empower the food pantry members and their families to take charge of their health and food choices in ways that are realistic, culturally relevant, and mindful of food choices and budget.



Questions?



A Novel Peer Mentor Model for Nutrition Education Within a Food Pantry “Community Cooks”



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