Waste Reduction at La Isla

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Waste Reduction at La Isla

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Collaborative Health & Human Services

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Author Note
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Abstract

Community Solutions is a non-profit organization that serves the community of South Santa Clara and San Benito Counties. At La Isla, Community Solutions’ safe house, a new program was implemented, which focused on reducing waste. Food waste is an issue at La Isla, because a lot of food expires before it is used. The program focused on three key factors to reduce waste, including: creating and implementing a new inventory system, educational cooking classes and the creation of a recipe book in English and Spanish. The classes provided life skills such as cooking, nutritional information and awareness of the amount of waste created. The inventory system focused on eliminating waste produced by over ordering. The recipe book provided cooking opportunities outside of the cooking classes for current and future clients. Through the dedication and work of the La Isla staff and intern(s), the new program reduced the overall waste at La Isla. Recommendations to ensure the success of the program would be to implement training for the staff members at the shelter for: the inventory system and cooking classes.

*Keywords:* waste reduction, inventory system, Community Solutions, recipe book, classes.
Agency & Communities Served

Community Solutions is a non-profit organization that focuses on providing services for the community. Their mission: “Is to create opportunities for positive change by promoting and supporting the full potential of individuals, the strengths of families and the well-being of our community” (Community Solutions, 2017). The program is the Solutions to Violence program. Within the SVP program there is La Isla, a safe house for women, who are survivors of domestic violence (DV), human trafficking (HT) and sexual assault (SA). The mission of Community Solutions, Solutions to Violence Programs is to:

- Provide trauma-informed, survivor-center and empowerment-based services to strengthen and support survivors of domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. They also provide education, prevention, and community outreach services on these issues for schools, groups, and the community. (Community Solutions, 2017)

Programs offered at Community Solutions include; peer counselling, crisis line, referrals, housing, outreach, emergency shelter, assistance with restraining orders, in-person advocates, safety planning and case management. La Isla is a safe house for women who have a high fatality risk, but Community Solutions serves the Santa Clara County from South San Jose to San Benito County, all genders, age and race. Santa Clara County has a demographic of 26.9% Hispanic or Latino and white alone at 35.2%, according to the 2010 US Census. According to the CDC, “37.3% of non-Hispanic White women, [and] 34.4% of Hispanic women…experience contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime” (Niolon, P. H., et al., 2017). In the Solutions to Violence Program’s safe house, La Isla, all the
clients observed by the intern falls under these two demographics; white and/or Hispanic/Latino. The age ranges all over from early twenties to the late sixties. Community Solutions, main offices serve the community, men, women, children, families, any gender, age or sexual orientation.

**Problem Description**

Why is waste so important? In the United States, waste is a problem. A significant amount of food is wasted, but still people are going hungry. It is often assumed that those who are hungry are homeless, but that is not the only group affected.

One in six Americans living below the poverty line suffers from “low food security.” This is officially defined as involving situations in which “food intake was reduced at times during the year because [households] had insufficient money or other resources for food” — in other words, hunger. (Agresti, J., 2012)

The homeless population is often associated with people who need food and go hungry, which should be a concern. In the United States alone as of “January 2018 Point-in-Time count…identified 553,742 people experiencing homelessness” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2017). How much food is being wasted everyday that could be going to the hungry and homeless? In the world 1/3 of all food goes to waste. This would equal approximately 1.3 billion tons of food. It is estimated that 1.3 billion tons would be able to feed up to 4 times all the hungry people in the world (Gustavsson, 2011). The food thrown away adds to waste and is a loss of money. The United States waste is estimated to be between 30% and 40% of their food (USDA, 2010). This food has a value of 165 billion dollars; that is the amount
of money we throw away. An average American family throws away 240 lbs of food per year, that food ends up in the landfill (Gustavsson, 2011).

La Isla gets a large order from the food bank and a lot of the food goes unused and is thrown away. A lot of the food spoils and it goes into the trash. When food goes bad, the house members leave it in the fridge and causes sanitation problems. This also causes the house members to not want to go in the fridge or use any of the other non-spoiled contents. Staff is tasked with cleaning out the fridge, on average they throw away anywhere from half a garbage bag of refrigerated food to a whole garbage bag. The items that are thrown away the most are fresh produce, and dairy products. Though there is constant disposal of food received from the food bank, there is a surplus of canned products in the pantry.

**Contributing Factors**

The first contributing factor is that the members of the household do not cook. Some of the members of the household have expressed they do not know what to cook using the items, food expires before they can use it, and it is easier to get food such as fast food. “32 percent of people who earn less than 130 percent of the federal poverty line — $32,630 a year for a family of four — ate fast food daily” (CDC, 2018). A lot of the household do not have a steady income or are receiving assistance and would fall under the federal poverty line. Because of this, households with little means will eat unhealthy foods that are inexpensive and off the dollar menu at fast food restaurants.

The second contributing factor is limited to no access to recipes. There is one computer where the clients can look up recipes. The time is limited though which limits the access to electronic recipes. There are no recipe books that are provided at the shelter. According to
Kitchn (2012), “Instead of relying on family recipes, newspapers, or cookbooks, it’s estimated that 50 percent of consumers now use sites like Twitter and Facebook to learn about food, while another 40 percent learn about food from websites, apps, or blogs”. Lack of electronics such as smartphones, computers, and tablets directly impacts the access of recipes for the household members.

There is a lack of inventory or knowledge of the expiration dates on the food, especially on what is each type of label means. There are different types of dates on labels, each one has a different meaning. According to WebMD (n.d.), the only items that are required by federal law to be labeled for expiration are infant formula and some baby foods; some states also mandate pulling dairy from store shelves on the expiration date.” The vegetables and dairy should be monitored and dates should be easily accessed on the fresh produce. If people do not know how old the food it they are more likely to be hesitant to eat it and more likely to throw it out.

**Consequence**

The first consequence is the increase of food going into the landfill. When food is thrown away because it is not used in time, this contributes to waste. According to the EPA, “over 36 million tons of food waste reach reaches landfills each year in the United States” (EPA, 2018). Waste is then being added to the landfill when it could be avoided by using the food before it expires/spoils.

The second consequence is the unsanitary environment that is caused by the food spoiling. There is no push for cooking in the household and there are no recipes that incorporate the food that is supplied. In addition there is a lack of communication of when food is going bad or has spoiled in the fridge. This causes food to become moldy. The consequence of the food
going bad in the fridge/pantry is that it makes the fridge dirty and smell. This aids to the household not wanting to use the food supplied in the fridge and pantry creating more unsanitary conditions. When food spoils there can be a presence of mold on the items. Mold can make individuals sick, have symptoms or get infections. According to the CDC:

Exposures to molds can lead to symptoms such as stuffy nose, wheezing, and red or itchy eyes, or skin. Severe reactions may include fever and shortness of breath. Exposure to mold or dampness may also lead to the development of asthma in some individuals.

(CDC, 2017)

There is also a risk for disease with expired food in the fridge and pantry, it creates an unsanitary environment. Rodent problems have been evident in the safe house. There is a greater risk of disease if the problem is not maintained for solved.

According to Orkin,

Rat bites and scratches can result in disease and rat-bite fever. Rat urine is responsible for the spread of leptospirosis, which can result in liver and kidney damage. It can also be contracted through handling or inhalation of scat. Complications include renal and liver failure, as well as cardiovascular problems. Lymphocytic choriomeningitis (LCMV), a viral infectious disease, is transmitted through the saliva and urine of rats. (Orkin, n.d.)

These are just some of the diseases that can be caused by long term exposure to a rodent infestation. This can be prevented by proper disposal and storage of food.

**Problem Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing Factors</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1: No inventory of</td>
<td>The waste of food at La Isla</td>
<td>Consequence 1: The waste in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Capstone Project Description and Justification**

**Project Purpose**

The capstone project addressed the goals of reducing waste and improving the lives of the house members/clients. The first step of the project addressed the contributing factor of no inventory of the food bank food. In order to complete the inventory tracking sheet, the pantry and three fridges needed to be cleaned out, organized and then the food counted. A system on a Google Spreadsheet was created. It divided the food that was on hand into different categories and allowed staff and intern(s) to easily adjust the food that was used and thrown away. This spreadsheet was shared with the staff members and it allowed for easier communication. When it came time to place a food bank order, the document allowed the staff member to know how much is on hand, what was needed and what there was plenty of. This will reduce the waste and over ordering of foods that are not being eaten. The inventory sheet will be shared with all staff members, which allowed for emergency boxes to be created when needed with the exact items that the clients want and use. This also helped with the reduction of food waste and help feed many others who are in need of food.

**Project Justification**
By implementing the new system of tracking, inventory and cleaning the pantry and fridges, it will make the food more accessible to be used before it expires. The EPA encourages households to buy what you are going to use, this will reduce waste a significant amount. (2015) According to the EPA (2018), “It is easy to overbuy or forget about fresh fruits and vegetables. Store fruits and vegetables for maximum freshness; they’ll taste better and last longer, helping you to eat more of them.” This will reduce waste and improve sanitary conditions within the household. The classes being provided and the creation of the cookbook will give the clients an opportunity to learn how to cook and have the means to do so. This will improve the quality of life, the relationships within the household, educate and reduce waste.

Assessment Plan

The plan to measure effectiveness was to collect data with the tracking sheets that were implemented. The first sheet tracks how much food is being thrown out due to expiration dates and spoiling. The second tracking sheet is tracking what food is being used. By creating and following the new inventory tracking sheet, better quality orders can be placed at the food bank. Over ordering can be eliminated and food can be used before food goes to waste. The house is also tracking the amount of food that is being thrown out during the weekly cleanout of the fridge and pantry. Attendance is being recorded for clients who attend the classes and participate.

Expected Outcomes

The project will reduce waste by using the food during the cooking classes, providing a recipe book so the clients can use the food, and by creating an inventory and tracking sheets to improve food bank orders. The cooking classes will create better relationships and give an opportunity for the household to bond and learn as well as reduce waste. Buy-in from staff and
the organization is necessary to continue the project and system. The most vital part of the project is that it can be sustained by staff after the interns leave.

**Project Implementation**

The project focused on waste reduction throughout the shelter by the implementation of classes for the clients, a recipe book for the organization, creation of an inventory system for the staff, an addendum to the welcome packet that includes a pantry introduction, and the involvement of interns in the foodbank process. The first part of the project was to get the involvement of the interns in the food bank process. How the intern(s) were involved with the process is by helping with the order. The intern(s) went with staff to the food bank to pick up the order on Wednesdays at 10am. They then delivered food to the office, and put away the food at the house. To optimize storage and maintain a sanitary environment the fridges and pantry were cleaned and organized. A supply list was requested for the pantry. The supplies were to be used for proper storage of food to reduce the exposure to the elements, to pests and to make the food easier to access. Next the intern(s) created a Google Spreadsheet of the food items on hand. A tracking slip was implemented for the household clients. When they use food they filled out a slip, this allowed the food being used to be tracked. The food that was thrown out was marked on the spreadsheet. Feedback from staff and clients were requested on the tracking sheets and inventory sheet. After the feedback was given the sheets were then adjusted and changes were made to create a more efficient system.

The second part of the project was implementing cooking classes on Sunday. The classes involved staff, intern(s) and household members for two hours. The cooking classes used recipes
tailored to the food bank food on hand. These recipes were compiled into a recipe book that are in English and Spanish at the end of the project.

Participants include: interns, Solutions to Violence Director, House Manager, Case Workers, La Isla relief staff and clients at La Isla. The intern(s) implemented the project and reported back to the director. Interns worked with the house manager with the food bank process. Interns sent a supply list to director and supervisor. Clients, staff and interns participated in classes and data collection.

Materials that were needed were the access to computers, printer, and La Isla kitchen. The supplies requested included: storage containers, shelves, boxes, cookware, binders, binder dividers and plastic sleeves. These items were sent to the program director to be approved and be provided by using the funds designated to La Isla. A detailed three part implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the detailed timelines in Appendix A, B and C.

**Project Results**

Having the interns involved with the food bank process, improved cleanliness and sanitary conditions of the pantry. This was achieved by the intern(s) cleaning and organizing the pantry before and after the food bank pick up. An issue that frequently came up, was the ability for intern(s), to go to the food bank due to last minute scheduling changes from the staff at La Isla. A major barrier for intern(s) being involved in the food bank process, is that they are unable to go to the food bank alone.

The cleaning and organization of the pantry and fridges was successful with the help of staff, interns, and clients. It is maintained daily now with a new chore list for all the clients. A deep cleaning day is now assigned to clients on Sunday, with the help of relief staff. What was
not achieved in this crucial part of the process was the supplies requested in April. The supplies were never ordered despite numerous requests, possibly due to staffing shifts. The pantry is organized to the best of the capabilities of staff, intern(s) and client(s), but there are no storage containers to properly store food. Without the proper storage containers, food is exposed to bugs, rodents and spoil faster. These factors contributed to the unsanitary conditions of the pantry. To combat the lack of supplies, staff implemented a stricter cleaning schedule for the clients, this ensures that this component of the project will continue once intern(s) leave.

An addendum to the “Welcome Packet” was created. This addendum has been approved by the house manager and case manager in charge of the “Welcome Packet”. It has been implemented successfully into the existing hard copies and added to the digital copy. This addendum is a brief description of what to expect in the pantry and fridges and some guidelines to ensure the upkeep of the fridges and pantry. Refer to Appendix D to see the addendum.

The creation and implementation of the inventory system, allowed for intern(s) to monitor the food, keep track of inventory and this helped improve the conditions of the pantry and fridges. The inventory system created a better organization of the pantry, that allows staff and clients to access food more easily. The main goal of the inventory system was to make ordering of the foodbank food more efficient. This goal has not been met, because it has not used by staff despite the access to the live document on Google Spreadsheets, as well as a PDF. There is a lack of buy-in with the staff and organization because intern(s) are the only ones currently maintaining the inventory sheet. This impacts the longevity of the program and specifically this component of the program. Feedback was requested by intern(s) from the staff to make the spreadsheet more inviting for staff. After several conversations with various staff and the mentor,
final adjustments were made to the Google spreadsheet in order to make it easier for staff to use.

Tracking sheets for clients were not consistently used. Three different versions of tracking slips were created to track waste and usage of items in the pantry and fridge. Only three slips were filled out over the period of tracking data. Refer to Appendix E for final tracking slips.

The implementation and creation of the class agendas, were successful. The outcomes that were not reached were attendance, updated supplies, and addressing toddler safety concerns. To combat attendance issues, flyers were created, sign-up sheets and scheduling one on one cooking classes. This helped ensure the attendance of one person. There were still 3 no shows with the one on one scheduled sign ups. Of those three no shows we had an alternate client fill in. A request for cooking supplies was made by intern(s). The list was not approved because staff had requested some of the items already. An issue that arose with those new supplies was that a significant amount of them disappeared. Within a few weeks the items were no longer there, and it became more difficult to cook. In the house, there are a lot of clients, but most of them are children under the age of 5. This contributed to the lack of attendance due to the necessity of child care and safety of children in the kitchen. Refer to Appendix F for the cooking class flyer.

The recipe book consisted of 25 recipes in English and Spanish as of October 2019. There are several different categories that the recipes fall under. There needs to be more expansion on certain categories including; children friendly foods and desserts. The outcome that has not been met, is the original layout assembly of the binder. The supplies that were requested by the intern(s), were never received. These supplies included; cardstock, color ink, binders, tabs, sleeves and use of the office P-Touch. Intern(s) took the initiative to find binders in the
storage shed and the mentor had plastic sleeves already and ordered additional. The binders are assembled using the products that the intern(s) had on hand.

Overall the project did achieve the goal of some reduction in food waste at La Isla. With a buy-in from the organization and with more support and participation from staff there can be an increase in waste reduction. Refer to Figure 1 in Appendix G for data tracking of waste. Figure 1 shows the data of how much food was wasted every week for 21 weeks. From March 15th, 2019 to approximately the beginning of June, intern(s) were deep cleaning and emptying the pantry and shelter fridge shelves without staff and client assistance. In the beginning of June, staff implemented stricter cleaning chores and a designated deep cleaning day on Sunday for clients. Figure 1 only tracks what the intern(s) threw out and does not include what clients or staff have thrown out.

**Conclusion & Recommendations**

The inventory component of this project is not sustainable beyond this semester due to the lack of buy-in from staff. Specific to this capstone project and any others to follow that require a new system or protocol, in order to ensure sustainability, a training session for staff would be beneficial. Having management implement this training would help with the staff continuing the new inventory system on the Excel Spreadsheet/Google Spreadsheet and promote buy-in from the organization.

Recommendations that could benefit the mentor-intern relationship would be to ensure that there is an onsite mentor for the interns. There was a lack of communication between the mentor, management, and staff at the safe house, La Isla. This created an issue with buy-in from the staff for the intern(s) project at La Isla. Another issue that arises due to lack of
communication, had to do with last minute schedule changes to the staff at La Isla. When these changes occurred, and the intern(s) were often not informed, leaving the intern(s) locked out of the facility at times at which they had been scheduled to work. To improve this issue, when students first begin their internship at La Isla, it is important for them to attend an introductory meeting to familiarize them with staff. Once a Capstone project has been approved, a follow-up meeting with staff will help ensure buy-in from all appropriate organizational stakeholders. The best way to ensure the sustainability and longevity of any current and future intern projects is by having staff buy-in.
References


Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from

Retrieved from
https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF

https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm
## Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>FINISH BY</th>
<th>ASSIGNED TO</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Write and edit class plan</td>
<td>March 29th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop weekly recipes</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create flyer</td>
<td>April 3rd, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Rotating weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyer posting and sign up sheet</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather food supplies for meal</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td>Physically take out meat, set aside for Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class sign in book for Osnium</td>
<td>April 7th, 2019</td>
<td>August 18th</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish meeting time/venue for class.</td>
<td>April 3rd, 2019</td>
<td>Approved and set for ongoing classes</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Erica and Aida approved Sundays 11am-2pm</td>
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<td>extra supplies</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>As needed</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Send request to Alyssa on Wednesdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather feedback from house guests</td>
<td>April 14th, 2019</td>
<td>August 18th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Stored on shared Google drive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data tracking April</td>
<td></td>
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## Appendix B

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print Recipe</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Alternate weekly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjust recipe based on inventory</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translate recipe</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>October 4th</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take picture of final prepared meal</td>
<td>April 7th, 2019</td>
<td>August 18th</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply request</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>August 16th</td>
<td>Erica &amp; Alyssa</td>
<td>Email sent by Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize recipes in binder</td>
<td>September 20th, 2019</td>
<td>November 3rd</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout of recipes</td>
<td>September 20th, 2019</td>
<td>November 3rd</td>
<td>Alex and Yesenia</td>
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### Appendix C

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Implementation Date</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop list of food</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Inventory sheet stored on Google Drive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop organization system</td>
<td>April 5th, 2019</td>
<td>November 3rd</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>NO supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Request supplies</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>Requested</td>
<td>Erica &amp; Alyssa</td>
<td>Email sent by Alex waiting approval and purchase</td>
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<td>Tracking Sheets</td>
<td>April 7th, 2019</td>
<td>August 23rd</td>
<td>Alex</td>
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<td>Create flyer for label dates</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>April 14th, 2019</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create flyer for best by, sell by etc.</td>
<td>April 12th, 2019</td>
<td>April 14th, 2019</td>
<td>Yesenia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data tracking-waste</td>
<td>March 15th, 2019</td>
<td>August 21st</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>Track how much we throw out of spoiled food and store in Google Drive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food bank</td>
<td>April 17th, 2019</td>
<td>August 14th</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Be more involved in ordering/pick up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback for tracking sheet</td>
<td>April 28th, 2019</td>
<td>August 21st</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Yesenia</td>
<td>adjust slips</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Welcome!

Fridge, Freezer and Pantry

Food provided by the shelter is available for everyone

- If you bring/purchase your own food, there are designated shelves for each room in the fridge and pantry.
- Please label your items with your initials and date.
- Please throw out spoiled/expired food.
- Please no pots or pans in the fridge.
- If you have any questions, feel free to ask staff.

Some foods you can find in the pantry:

- Beans, rice and pasta
- Fresh vegetables and fruit
- Canned items
- Frozen meat and bread
- Cereal, chips and cookies
- Eggs, milk and yogurt
## Appendix E

### Grocery List

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Items:</td>
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### Lista De compras

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comida:</td>
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Appendix F

YESENIA & ALEX’S

Cooking Class

Come join us!
Baked chicken, quinoa, veggies, and iced tea.
When: Sunday 4/28/19 at 11:00 am to 1 pm
Appendix G

Figure 1: Bags of Food Thrown Out