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Community Gardening & Nutrition Education Event to Improve Healthy Living

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Project Title: Community Gardening & Nutrition Education Event to Improve Healthy Living

Abstract

Catholic Charities (CC) is a non-governmental organization that is a part of a network of charities that focuses on immediate disaster response and helps to stabilize impacted communities. Their humanitarian-aid includes housing assistance, funding for health care services, disaster relief and distribution of food. The macro-level problem is too many people in Monterey County are at risk of diabetes. The micro-level problem is that residents of Eden Housing have a higher risk of not eating healthy foods. This project serves Eden Housing residents in Seaside where a gardening and nutrition education event was held to assist residents to plant vegetables and learn about nutritious eating and drinking. The expected outcome of the project is for Eden housing residents to learn about healthier eating and drinking options. The project was successful because families came together and planted vegetables every week. The agency will continue to lead gardening events to address obesity levels in Monterey County.

Agency Information and Partnering organizations

Agency Description

Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey (Catholic Charities) is a non-profit organization that provides help to anyone living in poverty within Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties. This organization is a faith based non-profit social service agency and a member of Catholic Charities of California, Inc., that provides aid to families and individuals from all backgrounds and beliefs who are struggling with poverty and other complex social and financial issues. They provide a way for people to work together and transform communities for the common good.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The mission of Catholic Charities is to “provide specified human services to the poor and disadvantaged, to promote justice, peace, human dignity, self-determination and self-sufficiency in accordance with the gospel and Catholic social justice teachings, and to cooperate with other individuals and groups of goodwill to strengthen our communities” (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). Besides providing service to people in need, Catholic Charities also advocates for social justice and encourages other people to do the same. Even though the agency is Catholic, it is open to aid families and communities from all backgrounds and beliefs. This Diocese assists individuals: providing them with training, tools, and resources to meet basic needs for life (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). In addition, they provide information and/or referrals to social service agencies within the community. Their main focus is on helping adults, guardians/parents, people experiencing material poverty and immigrants or refugees.

Programs and Services Provided

The core programs provided by Catholic Charities are financial stability, access to food, healthcare enrollment, laser tattoo removal, citizenship and legal immigration. The first program, “Hope in Home” serves families and individuals with short-term financial support; providing a one-time direct assistance to

pay for the 1st month of rent or past due rent, and past due home utilities (electricity, water, or gas) (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey). The second core program is access to food through CalFresh which is a federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that provides monthly financial aid to buy healthy and nutritious food. The provided aid can be used to buy food at many food stores and markets (Code for America, 2020). The third core program is healthcare enrollment in California's public health insurance Medicaid program (Medi-Cal) that provides health care services for low-income individuals including "children, seniors, persons with disabilities, foster care, pregnant women, and low-income people with specific diseases such as tuberculosis, breast cancer or HIV/AIDS" (State of California, 2020). All these programs contribute to society and the success of low-income families. The assistance given by Catholic Charities has different areas of focus that many families can benefit from.

Catholic Charities assists people by helping them complete applications for services and advocate for those in need. . Catholic Charities also provide education to reduce stigma associated with applying for benefits such as food stamps. The fourth core program is a laser tattoo removal, which provides funding for low-income people to be able to afford this expensive treatment. This is an important service, as it helps individuals increase their options for viable employment and economic and social opportunities (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). This opens a new path for people committed to change and provides them with the resources to obtain a job. The final core program is citizenship and legal immigration assistance to assist individuals achieve lawful permanent residency and support those who seek to become U.S. citizens through the "Legal Immigration and Citizenship Program."

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts and Modifications

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is increasingly impacting Catholic Charities as hundreds of people (negatively affected by the pandemic) call the office to seek assistance. People from "Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito and San Luis Obispo Counties call every day asking for help with their rent and utilities, legal immigration services, or to find out if they qualify for CalFresh (food) or Medi-Cal (health insurance)" (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). The Shelter in Place orders led to many people

losing their jobs and trying to live with no income. People are concerned about their families' stability with no paycheck. In order to continue offering their programs and services, Catholic Charities is working remotely with families' to address their needs; providing aid by phone, zoom, email and text messages. Also, by getting in touch with other people that might be interested in helping to support our communities.

Primary Community Partners

There are approximately 47 primary community partners that collaborate with Catholic Charities and come together to provide low-income families and individuals with essential resources to meet critical life necessities. CCDM collaborates with a wide range of supporting agencies in the region including: AmeriCorps, Center for Employment Training, Cesar Chavez Library, Door to Hope, Food Bank for Monterey County, Genesis House - Salinas, Hartnell College, Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo County, Monterey County Probation Department, Monterey County Public Health Department, Monterey Youth Center, Salvation Army (San Luis Obispo, Seaside) Santa Cruz Probation Department, Special Kids Connect, WIC (San Luis Obispo County) and Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). California State University of Monterey Bay - Collaborative Health and Human Services contributes to Catholic Charities by providing the ability for students to participate in internships delivered at this agency.

Communities Served: Demographic Profile and Needs Analysis

Catholic Charities is dedicated to serving anyone living in poverty within Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties (Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey, 2020). The Diocese of Monterey strives to provide services to help marginalized peoples gain self-sufficiency and stability through a range of services including case management and financial resources provided directly to clients. The agency works with other community-based organizations to provide communities with services and guide them towards stabilization. Especially low-income individuals that might face complex issues that trigger financial crises at any time.

Communities Served: Demographic Profile

The following data table describes the differences between the geographic areas and the meaning it has to the agency. The most important data categories in the table are the amount of household income and the percentage of people living below the poverty line. The individual examination of counties such as Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey and San Luis Obispo provides the comparison to the percentage of California population average. It is easier to understand what counties need the most help. For example, California as a whole has a percentage of 12.8 people living below the poverty line. San Luis Obispo's percentage is 13.4. This means that San Luis Obispo has a higher rate of poverty compared to the other counties. This is also reflected in the median household income with an amount of \$70, 681.00 compared to California with an average of \$75,277.00.

Table 1. Comparison of Demographic Data from Communities Served

Categories	Santa Cruz	San Benito	Monterey	San Luis Obispo	California
Population	274, 255	59, 416	435, 594	284, 010	39,512,223
Median age	37.9 yrs old	35.5 yrs old	34.7 yrs old	39.6 yrs old	36.3 yrs old
Gender: Male	49%	50%	49%	51%	49.7%

Female	51%	50%	51%	49%	50.3%
White population	57%	35%	30%	68%	37%
Hispanic population	34%	59%	59%	23%	39%
Median household income	\$86,941	\$81,977.00	\$70,681.00	\$71,148.00	\$75, 277.00
Language: English	67%	59%	45%	82%	60.5%
Spanish	27%	37%	47%	12%	38%
Live below the poverty line	12.3%	9.2%	13.4%	13.2%	12.8%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates*.

Analysis of Community Needs and Assets

Catholic Charities deal with important problems, issues and needs facing the communities in these four counties, in support of their main goals, including service to people in need, advocate for justice in social structures and encourage other people to raise their voice and help others. The primary problems that are being addressed by Catholic Charities are food insecurity and nutrition. There has been an increased concern for people obtaining CalFresh (food stamps) in Monterey County and vicinity, since it leads to bad health habits and more obesity. According to the U.S. News & World Report, Santa Cruz has an obesity prevalence of 18.6, 6.2% of diabetes and has an average of 4.4/100k local food outlets (2020). San Benito County has an obesity prevalence of 31.9, 8.4% of diabetes and has an average of 1.7/100k local food outlets (U.S News & World Report, 2020). Monterey County has an obesity prevalence of 27.6, 8.0% of diabetes and has an average of 3.7/100k local food outlets (U.S News & World Report, 2020). San Luis Obispo County has an obesity prevalence of 25.3, 6.9% of diabetes and has an average of 9.3/100k local food outlets. Compare this critical data to the national average of 33% obesity prevalence, 9.9% national median for diabetes and 4.2/100k local food outlets national median (U.S News & World Report, 2020).

There are several assets that exist within the communities mentioned above. Residents are empowered to transform their communities and use their abilities to build a better environment. The agency focuses on creating healthier habits for families by providing healthier choices of food and raising

awareness to increase exercising. Churches from different religions unify and collaborate with each other to provide people with the resources needed to have healthier choices.

Initial Capstone Project Ideas

Currently Facilitating Programs:

- **Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH program):** This program is an effort to focus on long-term development and success of all the children. Involves physical activities and health education. CATCH is a resource for creating and maintaining a healthy school or environment.
- **Resource Fair: University Village, Charles and Cypress apartments (Marina) and Campora Apartments (Soledad):** Providing apartment complexes with information about Catholic Charities, promoting healthy nutrition and physical education.
- **CalFresh Healthy Living and Nutritional Education:** The outcome of the program is to improve healthy choices. The focus is low-income populations eligible for SNAP (food assistance) and educating them on nutrition. This goal is met by the promotion of physical activity, nutrition education and messages delivered through the program outreach.
- **CC Wildfire Relief Program:** Direct assistance for evacuated families who have lost their stability due to wildfires. Evacuees call the wildfire line at Catholic Charities and fill out intake forms to receive assistance.

Capstone Project Idea

A possible project idea would focus on developing an educational intervention. The topic of the intervention would focus on healthy eating, nutrition and developing an awareness of the importance of physical activity and exercise to improve health. The information would be delivered in a workshop which would include activities such as painting, measuring sugar, exercising and nutritional education.

With COVID-19 affecting communities, children and youth are being transferred to online learning which results in youth staying at home, eating unhealthy foods and not exercising. This project might be carried out in partnership with University Village apartments (Marina), Charles and Cypress apartments (Marina) and Campora Apartments (Soledad). The agency has a budget of \$400 to develop and deliver this educational intervention to these apartment complexes. The capstone project will involve individual activities for youth. The purpose of this project is to create healthier habits and promote exercising. It will address issues such as obesity, stress, malnutrition and reducing the risk of other diseases. The outreach project is intended to be implemented once a month in one of the apartments at a time and compare the outcomes of each apartment complex monthly.

Capstone Project Title, Description, & Justification

Title: Community Gardening & Nutrition Education Event to Improve Healthy Living

Project Description

This capstone project is an educational intervention aimed at parents and children, to deliver information on how to obtain a healthier life including healthier choices and exercise. The educational intervention will be delivered through a garden event in which Catholic Charities and partners will work together to teach Eden Housing residents how to eat healthier and rethink their drinks. A balanced diet along with physical activity is the foundation of good health. Healthy eating includes minimizing processed foods and eating high-quality proteins, vitamins, minerals and water. Eating healthy reduces “risks of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, overweight, high cholesterol and the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and some cancers” (Food in Care, 2020).

Justification

The primary purpose of the project is to raise parent’s awareness about what their children eat and drink and to help them teach their children how to develop healthier habits and make better lifestyle choices. The agency’s longer term goal is for families in Monterey County to maintain good health and well-being. The Garden Community Event to Improve Healthy Living will motivate active children and young people to have a healthy body weight, feel good about themselves, have energy to be active and have stronger muscles and bones. Healthy living also avoids irritability, moody or aggressive behaviours. The planned intervention will be a community event that will focus on eating well in collaboration with Eden housing, Monterey County Health Department and Catholic Charities. The project’s main components include leading conference meetings in preparation for the event, organizing information, getting in contact with possible stakeholders, setting up designated spaces for agencies, content development, participant recruitment promotion strategy, supervising little surveys via text message or email based on signed up sheets.

Stakeholders

Benefits

Community Events to Improve Healthy Living will teach participants to give their bodies what they need in the right amounts and practice regular exercise. Having a healthy diet and doing exercise has many benefits such as: better sleep, having more energy, feeling better mentally and better concentration. Having a healthy diet also includes drinking habits, avoiding food traps, consistency and having a healthy-eating plan. Some benefits that people can get by living healthy are: saving money (by not buying junk food, alcohol, sugary drinks), decreasing their risk of developing many illnesses and taking control over their lives. Changing old habits can be difficult, but there are many steps that can be taken to become healthier. One step could be identifying less healthy habits and replacing them with healthier ones. Changing one thing at a time can be beneficial instead of trying to change all unhealthy habits at one time. The program will provide information about making small changes like going for a regular walk, reducing sugar gradually over a few weeks rather than all at once, buying more fruits and vegetables and fewer biscuits and chips.

The Garden Community Event to Improve Healthy Living project will provide Eden Housing residents with information about exercising, improvement of mood, combat diseases, boost energy and improve longevity. Obesity has risen in the United States in recent years and is currently a serious issue of concern for families staying at home and not being able to exercise or eat healthy due to social guidelines. Being physically active is essential to reach healthy goals. Exercise improves cardiovascular health, boosts the immune system and increases energy level. It is important to eat three healthy meals a day. They should consist of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk products. Control portion sizes that satisfy hunger and allow people to stop eating. It is important to choose foods that are low in saturated fats, cholesterol, salt and trans fat. One advice would be to look at the labels and comprise the highest concentrations of ingredients.

Teaching families the importance of nutrition and physical activity is crucial to avoid chronic diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is negatively affecting the school system and having children at home all day is a tremendous challenge. People staying at home tend to not exercise and eat unhealthy foods. Community Events to Improve Healthy Living will provide families with the adequate resources to have a healthier life and make better choices. They will obtain information about exercising and eating healthy. Catholic Charities will work with other non-profit organizations to create the event and unify efforts to increase awareness (U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services - Administration for Children & Families, 2020).

Project Implementation Plan, Scope of Work & Timeline

Implementation Method and Resources

The method used to implement the community event is a “promising practice.” This is a program or strategy that has worked within the same organization to promote different needs. In this case, the issue that is being addressed is to decrease obesity by promoting healthy eating habits and exercising. The community event shows “promise during its early stages for becoming best practice with long term sustainable impact” (U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services - Administration for Children & Families, 2020). The event will be a gardening event in which families from Eden Housing will have the opportunity to plant their own vegetables in a designated space. During the event, Catholic Charities will provide training about “rethink your drink” and “Myplate. The agency will be giving away required tools to take care of the garden and water bottles with recipes for residents to motivate themselves and eat healthier. A survey will be developed to find out areas that need improvement. This post-survey will determine what the participants learnt from the educational intervention and any continuing need they might have.

Participants

The role and responsibilities designated for intern, Silvia Torres, will be: coordinating the event, setting up spaces to deliver information, contacting stakeholders participating in the event, providing sanitation supplies, making sure attendees and volunteers are respecting the COVID-19 accommodations, conduct survey and collect data, as well as breaking down information and understand the needed improvements. There are some individuals that need to be included in the capstone project: Guillermina Hernandez (mentor), Efrain Flores (apartment complex coordinator), Catholic Charities’ volunteers and community agencies attending the event.

Supplemental

The need for the project was determined by the Nutritional Educational program in Catholic Charities. Eating well is fundamental to good health and well being. Eating healthy helps to reduce risk of

type 2 diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and some cancers (Food in Care, 2020). Learning to eat healthy has many other benefits such as sleeping better, having more energy and improving concentration. Having a well-balanced diet adds up to a healthier and happier life. Family members feel good about themselves, have healthy body weight, plenty of energy to be active, stronger muscles and bones, better physical and mental health (Food in Care, 2020). Giving the body what it needs prevents people from being moody, aggressive or irritable. Eating healthy is about eating a wide variety of foods in the right amounts. The garden community event to improve healthy living is taking into consideration the community members point of view. Efrain Flores who is the supervisor of the Eden apartment complexes and will facilitate the process of communication between the group and community members. For this community event, agencies have been invited to come and share their resources and provide families with information to expand their outreach.

Potential Challenges

Some of the challenges that the program might face are: lack of participation, attendees not following the COVID-19 accommodations, organization and incomplete surveys. The COVID-19 outbreak might discourage community members from participating due to the spread of the virus. This issue is being addressed by creating a protocol and respecting all the measures to prevent people from getting sick. There will be a designated volunteer that will make sure people attending the event will respect the COVID-19 accommodations. There will also be volunteers in each section organizing the tables and preventing people from contaminating the surfaces. During the event, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies will be provided to volunteers and community members to stay protected. Another challenge is incomplete surveys. Participants will be offered incentives to fill out surveys. This event is intended to have three more follow up meetings to track advances and feedback from participants to strengthen the program.

COVID-19 Accommodations

At the beginning of the community event, Catholic Charities will provide information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and what to do during the event to stay safe. The steps that must be taken

in order to follow state and county safety precautions according to California Department of Public Health include: wear cloth face mask, wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily, avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth, cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your elbow and wash hands afterwards. In the community event, we will encourage people to avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home away from people if anyone is sick or has symptoms like fever or cough. During the project period the best ways to prevent illness and the spread of virus person-to-person would be to avoid close contact with another (within about 6 feet) and avoid touching the designated tables for volunteers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

Scope of Work and Timeline

The Scope of Work (SOW) is part of an agreement with Catholic Charities where the community event project is described. During the project it is expected for the intern, Silvia Torres, to participate in the organization and delivery of the program. Active participation from Silvia is crucial to the development of the program and the success that it will have. The volunteer will lead the project and facilitate the process to be on a good track. The SOW table includes the main phases, activities, expected deliverable(s) and a general timeframe within which to complete them in order to achieve the expected outcomes and complete the project. The first phase was to select capstone projects, discuss project ideas with mentor and agency staff in September 2020. This was supported by a list of capstone ideas provided to mentors for review and approval in October 2020. The second phase of the plan project started in November 2020 and ended in December 2020. An outline and a list of possible items needed for the program was created in November and continued to select and reach out to possible stakeholders. The third face of implementation has three different parts which include: setting up specific dates and times to deliver the project, program first community event and break down activities and finally, continue with series in community and deliver it in different locations using the same protocol.

Scope of Work Template (*Sample phases, activities, deliverables, timeline*)

Title: Community Gardening & Nutrition Education Event to Improve Healthy Living

Project description: The creation of the project is to promote healthier eating and drinking habits through a garden community event that will provide residents with information and raise awareness.

Goal: Reduce health problems due to obesity in the community.

Primary objective of the project: Promote healthy eating and drinking habits for families and improve nutrition.

Phases		Activities/Tasks		Deliverables	Timeline/ deadlines
1	Select capstone project	1.1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor and agency staff	Generate a list of capstone project ideas.	Sept 2020
		1.2	Discuss ideas with agency staff	Submit a list of potential ideas to mentor for review/approval	Oct 2020
2	Plan project	2.1	Create an outline of the event	Create a list of possible items needed	Nov 2020
		2.2	Reach out to stakeholders	Find out who is participating	Nov 2020 - Dec 2020
3	Implement project	3.1	Set up specific dates and times to deliver program	Break down activities and responsibilities to have a successful program	Jan 2021
		3.2	First community event	Provide community with knowledge about healthy eating	Feb 2021
		3.3	Continue with series in community	Deliver community event at different locations following the same protocol	Feb and March 2021
4	Assess project	4.1	Create survey	Provide surveys to attendees and then collect the data	March 2021
		4.2	Break down data from surveys	Track progress and improvements needed,	April 2021
5	Report on project findings	5.1	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 2021
		5.2	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading	May 2021
		5.3	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final Capstone Festival presentation!	May 2021

Problem Description & Problem Model

Poor eating habits can affect the nutrient intake. Unhealthy eating habits contribute to the risk of developing some illnesses and other health problems. “Unhealthy diets contribute to approximately 678,000 deaths each year in the U.S., due to nutrition- and obesity-related diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes. In the last 30 years, obesity rates have doubled in adults, tripled in children, and quadrupled in adolescents” (Center for Disease and Prevention, NCHS Health E-stat, 2014). Overeating greasy food, milky products, sweet foods and highly flavoured foods increase the risk of having an unhealthy diet. In Monterey County, people are experiencing a greater risk of becoming overweight and eating junk food which leads to higher macro level consequences to society.

Figure 1. Problem Model Template		
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO AGENCY PROBLEM	AGENCY-SPECIFIC “MICRO-LEVEL” PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT	CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY
Not having information about healthy eating	Residents of Eden Housing have a higher risk of not eating healthy foods	Health issues: Obesity, type 2 diabetes, decrease of energy
More expensive to eat healthy, people cannot afford it.		Pass down unhealthy habits to children and future generations.
Not having enough time to cook healthy		Depression
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO BROADER PROBLEM	BROADER “MACRO-LEVEL” HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY
unhealthy eating habits	Too many people in Monterey County are at risk of diabetes	increase of premature death
lack of exercise		increase of health care cost
high rates of obesity		increase of other related health problems

Catholic Charities Micro-Level Problem Description

Residents of Eden Housing have a higher risk of not eating healthy foods. While working with Catholic Charities and the Eden Housing Department Complex, it has raised a concern about healthy eating. Families demonstrated enthusiasm to start eating healthier and drink healthier beverages, but did not have the adequate resources or information to start.

Project Assessment Plan

Expected Outcome(s)

The short term expected outcome is for participants to learn about eating vegetables and drinking healthier beverages. The two workshops used information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Myplate and Rethink Your Drink health promotion campaigns. In addition, families were provided with areas to plant their own vegetables during the event.

Measure(s) & Method

Participants will be asked questions about the knowledge they gained from the event. A satisfaction survey will be implemented at the gardening area designated in Eden Housing in March 2021. Participants will be asked to fill out the paper survey to provide information to the agency to make this program better. The data collected will be analyzed and results reported to the agency

Short term outcome(s)	Intermediate outcome(s)	Long-term outcome(s)/Impacts
<u>Knowledge gained</u> on healthy eating and drinking.	<u>Behavior change</u> to improve healthy eating and increased exercise	<u>Decrease obesity rates in Monterey County</u>

Short-term outcome

People increase their knowledge about eating healthier. They were provided with a water bottle and a bag with recipes which are intended to promote participants to eat more vegetables and drink more water.

Intermediate outcome

Behavior change related to improved healthy eating and increased exercise.

Long-term outcome

The long-term outcome would be to decrease obesity and promote healthier eating habits. The project developed a series to teach families how to maintain a healthy diet and drink more water.

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