

FOOD BANK OF SOUTH JERSEY:

Evaluation Report

Salem County

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Creative Research and Evaluation, LLC



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REPORT OVERVIEW

During the spring of 2016, Creative Research & Evaluation, LLC was engaged to conduct an evaluation of nutrition classes provided by the Food Bank of South Jersey (FBSJ) at four sites in Salem County, New Jersey. This report summarizes data from the research process.

FBSJ provides food assistance to low-income individuals and families. In addition to food distribution, FBSJ's Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) provides nutrition education to ensure that people are provided access to knowledge about healthy eating and cooking.¹ This evaluation analyzes the retention of the information contained in Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) courses and behaviors that participants report changing after attending programs. These programs include Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters® courses and FBSJ signature classes.

The evaluation draws on an evaluation approach known as Utilization Focused Evaluation. This approach is designed to maximize cooperation between the evaluator and evaluation stakeholders in order to ensure that the evaluation is focused on the actual needs of stakeholders and that data and findings generated by the evaluation will provide information and insights that are useable and relevant to stakeholders.² Qualitative tools were developed in consultation with FBSJ staff and volunteers assisted with focus group administration and relationships with participants.



Figure 1: Participating in Cooking Matters for Teens at Salem Special Services

Chapter One provides background information about the program, about nutrition generally in Salem, New Jersey and about the methodology utilized. This mixed-method evaluation utilized focus groups with children, teens, and families to ascertain participants' perceptions of HLI initiatives. It also utilized pre- and post-survey data administered by FBSJ staff, a questionnaire developed by the evaluator, and secondary data in the form of existing reports and documents.

Chapter Two provides an analysis of the findings. Evaluation findings reveal that participants appreciate the HLI courses, that participants retain nutrition information and skills taught during the courses and demonstrations, and that participants continue

¹ Food Bank of South Jersey. Healthy Living Initiative.

<http://www.foodbanksj.org/HealthyLivingInitiative.html>. Last accessed June 18, 2016.

² Patton, M.Q. (2008) *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, 4th Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

to practice what they have learned such as trying new foods, reading labels, and cooking with healthy ingredients.

The majority of focus group participants, regardless of the class or program they attended, describe their experiences with FBSJ as positive. Participants enjoy the content of the courses as well as the food prepared. More details about the evaluation's findings are presented in Chapter 2.

Chapter Three provides a summative analysis of findings, best practices, and recommendations.

Appendices of assessment tools used during the evaluation follow this chapter.

CHAPTER ONE: Project Background and Context

Overview of the Food Bank of South Jersey

According to its website, FBSJ operates on one simple premise: food should not be wasted when hungry people are in our midst. Their food distribution program links over 10 million pounds of food with more than 200 charitable food providers, such as food pantries, community kitchens and shelters.³



Figure 2: Cooking Matters for Teens at Salem High School

In addition, every year, FBSJ provides a variety of courses for children, teens, adults (caregivers and teachers), and families, ranging from one-time demonstrations for parents and signature courses for teens, to six-week courses for families based on *Share Our Strength's* Cooking Matters® curriculum.

Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters®

Cooking Matters® aims to provide low-income families with the skills to stretch their food budgets so children can eat healthy meals at home. Along with six-week hands-on cooking courses, Cooking Matters® provides interactive grocery store tours and online educational tools. Class participants are taught to use nutrition information to make healthier choices, and to purchase and prepare affordable meals.⁴ Different curricula are geared to reach adults, child-care professionals, families, children, and teens.

Cooking Matters for Adults® teaches low-income adults how to prepare and shop for healthy meals on a limited budget. Cooking Matters for Families® brings school-aged children and their families together to learn about healthy eating, planning meals as a family, and working together in the kitchen. Cooking Matters for Kids® teaches children in third grade through fifth grade how to prepare healthy meals and snacks and make smart choices wherever they are.

Cooking Matters for Teens® teaches adolescents in sixth grade and above how to make healthy food choices and prepare healthy meals and snacks for themselves, their families, and friends.

Each Cooking Matters® class uses interactive lessons to teach cooking, food safety, and food resource management using the USDA's MyPlate guidelines and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* as the foundation for basic nutrition. Cooking Matters® curriculum is based on the premise that food is to be enjoyed. Recipes emphasize food that is delicious, satisfying, and

³ See: <http://www.foodbanksj.org>. Last accessed June 18, 2015.

⁴ Share Our Strength (2013) *Cooking Matters In Your Community: Facilitators Guide*. Washington, DC.

healthy. By teaching families to shop for and prepare healthy, low-cost meals, the negative health and economic effects of hunger and poor diet can be avoided.

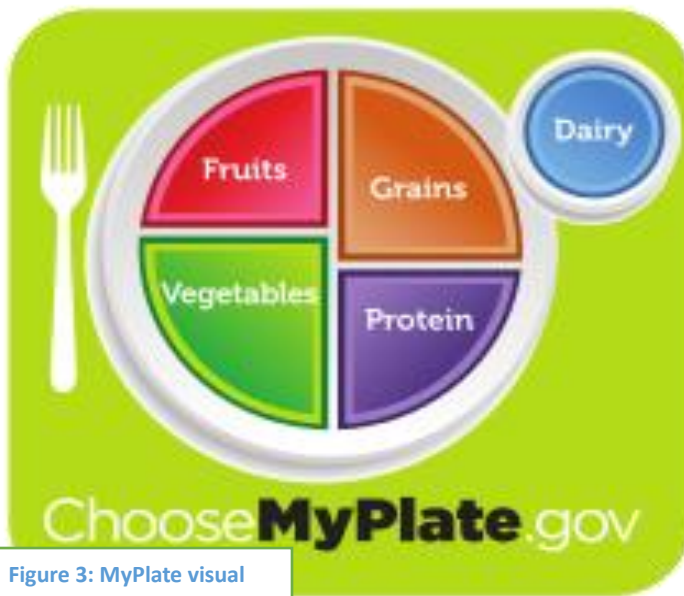


Figure 3: MyPlate visual

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) MyPlate Guidelines

The USDA first published MyPlate guidelines in 2011 as a replacement to the food pyramid schema. MyPlate is visualized as a round plate divided into 5 food groups: 40% vegetables, 30% grains, 20% protein, 10% fruits, with a small circle meant to represent a dairy serving. MyPlate guidelines include recommendations such as “make half your grains whole,” “make half your plate fruits and vegetables,” and “vary your protein food choices.”

Guidelines also promote portion control and reductions in sugar and sodium intakes. Like Cooking Matters®, MyPlate also asserts that food is to be enjoyed.

FBSJ Signature Courses



Figure 4: Students participating in a YNOT course

In addition to the Cooking Matters® courses mentioned above, the FBSJ has developed signature courses based on MyPlate guidelines, including Youth Nutrition Outreach Training (YNOT), a course school students ages 16-19 that teaches healthy cooking and public speaking. In this course, participants learn general nutrition concepts, safe food handling, and how to conduct a successful public cooking demonstration.

Nutrition in Salem County, New Jersey

Nationwide we are experiencing a historically high demand for food assistance. Unemployment and poverty rates have remained high since the 2008 economic recession. The number of households receiving nutrition assistance from the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program increased by approximately 50 percent between 2009 and 2013.⁵

Salem County ranks 20th out of the 21 New Jersey counties in health behavior measures including adult obesity and physical inactivity. County health rankings indicate adult obesity and physical inactivity in Salem County are at 34% and 31%, respectively, in comparison to the New Jersey state level rates of 25% for both adult obesity and physical inactivity. High rates of unemployment and poverty make food insecurity and food access a high priority. Within Salem County there is an 11.3% unemployment rate and 17% of the county's children are living in poverty.⁶

A total of 9,640 people (14.6% of the population) are food insecure in Salem County. The percentage of food insecure children in Salem County is even higher at 18.6% – a total of 2,890 children. Of the 24,656 households in Salem County, 2,523 (10.2%) are receiving SNAP (Food Stamp) benefits that work to alleviate food insecurity.⁷ Food insecure households are those that are uncertain of having, or are unable to acquire, adequate food to meet the needs of all of their members because they have insufficient money or other resources for food.⁸ In addition, Salem is rural and the least densely populated county in New Jersey, making access to food stores challenging for residents with a resulting high reliance on convenience foods and fast food restaurants.

Salem Health and Wellness Foundation

In 2012, FBSJ offered its first cooking classes in Salem County at the Salem Family Success Center. Five families learned to prepare nutritious meals on limited budgets. Brenda Goins, Executive Director of the Salem Health and Wellness Foundation (SHWF) heard that the feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and was determined to have *HLI* programming made available to more Salem County residents. With grants in 2013 and 2014, SHWF enabled FBSJ to expand its presence in Salem.⁹

In conjunction with the Community Foundation of New Jersey, SHWF awarded a grant to FBSJ in August 2015 for a major expansion of services. Goins indicates that the decision to support FBSJ and HLI on a larger scale was in step with SHWF's *Healthy Kids, Bright Futures*

⁵ Feeding America (2014) *Hunger in America National Report*. Chicago, IL.

⁶ <http://salemwellnessfoundation.org/apply/new-initiatives/>, last accessed June 30, 2016.

⁷ <http://salemwellnessfoundation.org/apply/new-initiatives/>, last accessed June 30, 2016.

⁸ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (2010) *Greater Philadelphia Food System Study*. Philadelphia, PA.

⁹ <http://foodbanksj.org/2015/12/16/healthy-living-initiative-continues-expansion-in-salem-county/>, last accessed June 30, 2016.

*Initiative.*¹⁰ The first objective of this initiative is to “Reduce Childhood Obesity by Promoting Healthier Eating Habits and Lifestyles and Nutrition Education.”¹¹

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Primary data sources for the evaluation of HLI courses consisted of qualitative data collected from:

- 1) Focus groups conducted at three sites in Salem County. Focus groups were conducted with one family (two children, one teen, and one parent) and thirteen high school students who participated in a variety of HLI courses between August 2015 and June 2016. These focus groups provided information about Cooking Matters for Families, Cooking Matters for Teens, Healthy Baking for Teens, and YNOT.
- 2) Interviews with site staff (two program administrators) at two different sites.
- 3) Conversations with Food Bank volunteers and staff.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the location, age group, and courses discussed in each focus group or interview.

Table 1: Overview of Focus Groups

Site	Course	Course Participants	Course Dates	Focus Group Participants
Penns Grove High School	Cooking Matters for Teens	6-12 participants	Oct.-Nov. 2015 (6 sessions)	8 teens (mixed gender)
Penns Grove High School	Healthy Baking for Teens	7-14 participants	Feb. 2016 (3 sessions)	
Salem High School	Cooking Matters for Teens	12 participants	Spring 2016 (6 sessions)	5 teens (mixed gender)
Salem High School	Healthy Baking for Teens	5 participants	Spring 2016 (3 sessions)	
Salem High School	Youth Nutrition Outreach Program	6-16 participants	March-April 2015 (5 sessions)	
Riverview Family Success Center	Cooking Matters for Families	4 families	Jan.-Feb. 2016 (6 sessions)	4 members of the same family (two children, one teen, mother)
Salem Special Services	Cooking Matters for Teens	10 participants aged 13-20	Oct.-Nov. 2015 (6 sessions)	N/A (administrator interviewed)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ <http://salemwellnessfoundation.org/apply/new-initiatives/>, last accessed June 30, 2016.

Each focus group was modified to ask participants questions specific to the program under discussion. Qualitative data reveals the perspectives of HLI participants in their own words, their thoughts about the courses, opinions about the challenges of making changes to healthy cooking and eating, and recommendations on how to improve the courses. At sites that hosted multiple activities or courses over a long period of time, some focus group participants' responses also included comments about other programs than the ones under discussion. Specifically, teens at both Salem and Penns Grove High Schools participated in multiple courses, making it challenging to ascertain what they learned in each course.

In addition, the evaluation reviews a breadth of secondary and quantitative data including:

- 1) Relevant background documents and prior evaluations.
- 2) Background information on each site, classes conducted and curriculum for each course.
- 3) End-of-course reports prepared by Food Bank staff which include their reviews of pre- and post-survey data collected for each course.
- 4) Questionnaires the evaluator administered during focus groups. The questionnaire provides supplemental data such as favorite recipes and behaviors that have changed since attending a demonstration or completing a course. Like the focus group questions, each questionnaire was modified to reflect the course or demonstration. An example of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Research Questions

The evaluation was organized to ascertain two basic things: 1) Knowledge – what do participants remember learning from HLI courses and demonstrations? 2) Behavior – in what areas do participants report change after experiencing these programs? As a result, evaluation tools were designed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What nutrition concepts do participants of different courses report retaining 1 to 12 months after completing HLI programs?
- 2) Do participants report changing healthy cooking, label reading and mindful shopping (where applicable) 1 to 12 months after completing HLI programs?
- 3) What specific foods do participants report consuming more often (or less often) after completing HLI classes?
- 4) What are participants' perceptions of the format, style and content of the classes offered and the recipes practiced or sampled during classes?

In addition, this year's evaluation included data about community partners' perceptions of collaborating with the Food Bank.

- 5) What are site staff perceptions of partnering with the Food Bank?

- 6) What are recommendations for improvements/modifications?

CHAPTER TWO: RETENTION AND REPORTED CHANGE

Findings below are divided into five sections: 1) what participants report **learning** (retention) and 2) what they reporting **changing** (behavior) after taking or completing HLI courses; 3) perceptions of the courses themselves; 4) other reported impacts; 5) challenges to making nutrition changes.

Data reveal that participants enjoyed the courses and demonstrations. Participants learned new nutrition information based on MyPlate and new skills including label reading. Many participants reported changes in how they purchase, prepare, and consume healthy food after completing a course. Participants report that they shared what they learned with other family members, friends and co-workers.



Figure 5: Learning about MyPlate at Salem High School

Section One: Participant Retention of HLI Courses and Demonstrations

Adult, child, and teenage participants who completed HLI courses and demonstrations were able to identify specific nutrition skills that they learned, from selecting healthy foods to preparing new recipes. A few participants recall basic food sanitation and the proper way to hold a knife. Most focus group participants recall demonstrations and lessons clearly and in detail:

“I remember learning how to use the materials they brought like the right way to cut, the right way to prepare food, and like sanitary precautions and stuff like washing your hands.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

When asked what they remember the most about the courses, focus group participants cite either the importance of label-reading or nutrition concepts associated with MyPlate first. These tools are the backbone of HLI curriculum and what participants remember most vividly.

FINDING 1: Participants report learning how to identify healthy foods using MyPlate guidelines and label reading.

MYPLATE

Participants identify the information in MyPlate as important to understanding nutrition. MyPlate guidelines emphasize portion control, reductions in salt and sugar intake, and increases in fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. HLI courses present alternatives to common foods and demonstrate recipes that meet MyPlate guidelines.

When asked why MyPlate is important, focus group participants responded:

“We learned about MyPlate - grains, vegetables, proteins, fruit and dairy to balance what you eat.” (Child, Cooking Matters for Families)

“MyPlate teaches you what you should have every day and the portions you should have.” (Child, Cooking Matters for Families)

“MyPlate is the healthy way to eat, you got to have a balance between vegetables, grains milk, and meat.” (Teen, Salem High School)

LABEL-READING

Across all of the sites and courses, many focus group participants cite label reading as key to changing what they put in their bodies. Most participants report not having label-reading skills prior to taking courses and not understanding the potential differences between what is advertised on the front of the product and what the product might actually contain. As mentioned below, label reading is also the behavior change that participants report retaining the most after HLI courses. Focus group participants also report using labels to identify nutrition differences between brands of the same food.

“I remember learning about the label reading about knowing how many calories you're eating. You're only supposed be eating a certain amount of calories.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

“I know when we were talking about the ingredient section and the first ingredient is mainly what you're eating, so it kind of tells you what you're really eating instead of what they put on the front of the box.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

“It taught me when I go out to purchase food to look at the nutrition values.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

“I remember that not all ingredients are good for you and sometimes they lie about what is in the box, like they put stuff on the front to make you believe it is better for you.” (Teen, Salem High School)

“Checking the labels on the side to see the different sugars, proteins and stuff that you get from the drinks and food.” (Teen, Cooking Matters for Families).

“Don’t trust what you see on the front, you gotta check the back!” (Child, Cooking Matters for Families).

Identifying Whole Grains

Both adult and child focus group participants also specified label reading as an important tool for identifying whether a food product contains whole grains:

“I also remember learning that the label thing on the back of the foods and the fact that sometimes they lie about they put stuff on the front to make you believe it's better for you. Like say for example on this they put whole-grain but if it doesn't say whole-wheat flour on the ingredients that it's not whole-grain” (Teen, Salem High School).

Pre- and post-survey data that FBSJ collected indicates that 100% of participants at Salem High School and Penns Grove High School were able to identify a whole grain by reading the food label after completing a HLI course.¹²

Reducing sugar, salt, and portions

MyPlate encourages the use of label reading as a tool to reduce daily sugar and salt intake, and to learn about portions and portion-control. Focus group participants report:

“I remember learning the different sugars, which are good for you and which are not, and the different oils, like using spray stuff instead of butter.” (Teen, Salem High School)

“I remember learning about different types of sugar like brown sugar, and using sea salt instead of regular salt.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

“I know about portions and eating the right amount, not too much, of certain stuff like salt.” (Child, Cooking Matters for Families)

Section Two: Participants’ Reported Behavior Change

FINDING 2: Participants report changes in eating, shopping, and cooking habits after completing HLI courses.

¹² Data from end-of-course reports (Healthy Baking for Teens at Salem High School and Health Baking for Teens at Penns Grove High School) prepared by Food Bank staff.



Figure 6: HLI courses stress hands-on learning

SHOPPING HABITS

For our adult focus group member, her HLI course resulted in behavior change at the food store. Data from the small focus group with participants in Cooking Matters for Families reveals changes in shopping habits, including avoiding aisles in the grocery store with processed snack items. Children report that they request different foods from caregivers, but few children or teens have control over what is purchased for the house. A few teenaged participants from Cooking Matters for Teens courses reported avoiding soda and buying more fruit after the courses, and trying to find “more balanced snacks.” One teen reported that they now reserve “getting bad snacks like chips and stuff” for special occasions. One teen shared that after the course, “I check labels now” (Penns Grove High School), while another shared, “I check calories fiber and protein now” (Penns Grove

High School). Another teen from Penns Grove reported that she has influenced the beverages her family purchases: “Instead of soda, we usually buy lighter juices now, or just drink a bunch of water.” Participants in this focus group agreed that even if their family has not changed the food it purchases, that “we know now, we know what we should eat and this will help us in the future.”

COOKING AND EATING HABITS

For adults, reported changes in cooking and eating habits include substituting healthier ingredients, eliminating high-sugar foods such as soda, reducing salt on cooked and uncooked food, using seasonings instead of salt, baking instead of frying, and avoiding convenience foods. These changes can impact nutrition in the household. As the one adult participant of Cooking Matters for Families shared, “We don’t cook as much fried foods anymore, we bake more, like baked chicken.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

Pre- and post-survey data that FBSJ collected from participants in Cooking Matters for Families at Riverview Family Services reveals an increase in eating non-fried vegetables more than once a day, an increase in eating green salads, and an increase in eating low-fat and dairy-free products.¹³

¹³ Data from end-of-course report (Riverview Cooking Matters for Families) prepared by Food Bank staff.

As mentioned above, participants recall learning about MyPlate during HLI courses; they also report using MyPlate to change cooking and eating habits. Pre- and post-survey data that FBSJ collected from YNOT participants at Salem High School indicates that before the class, no participants were using MyPlate as a guide for preparing or eating meals. After the course, 83.3% reported that they were now using MyPlate as a guide for preparing or eating meals.¹⁴

Other changes that participants shared during focus groups include using wheat bread instead of white bread, eating more fiber, and “staying away from certain things like “lots of sugar in my drinks” (Penns Grove High School). Another teen shared that because the course did not provide meat for sandwiches during a cooking demonstration, she has reduced the amount of processed sandwich meats she eats, substituting instead spinach or cheese. One teen from Salem High reported, “I try to get that everyday balance in my everyday eating habits now, like a vegetable, a grain, a protein.” Another teen shared that since taking the course, he “now eats fruit,” while his classmate reported that she eats less sugar and fewer sweets since taking HLI courses.

Section Three: Participants’ Perceptions of Courses and Demonstrations

FINDING 3: Participants report trying and enjoying new foods and recipes during courses and demonstrations.

Both MyPlate guidelines and Cooking Matters® curriculum put forth that food is to be enjoyed. Changing nutrition habits, while challenging, can also be fun and can introduce people to new taste experiences. Recipe demonstrations aim to have participants try foods that they may not have tasted before, like black bean brownies. A focus group participant reported:

“I like the actual learning part and getting to try new ingredients and trying to broaden your horizons by trying new things.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

Participants of courses and demonstrations report really enjoying at least one new recipe. Most report that there was not a recipe that they didn’t like. Teens report trying foods that they had never tasted before, including spinach and tofu.

Favorite recipes include:¹⁵

Sweet Potato Bread (Penns Grove)

Granola Bars (Salem High School)

¹⁴ Data from end-of-course report (YNOT at Salem High School) prepared by Food Bank staff.

¹⁵ Data from focus group questions as well as written questionnaire administered during focus groups.

Black Bean Brownies (Salem High School)

Pizza with Vegetables (Penns Grove)

Fruit Salad (Penns Grove)

Sandwiches with Spinach, Tomato, Cheese on Potato Bread (Salem High School)

Stovetop Mac-n-Cheese (Riverview)



Figure 7: Participants in Cooking Matters for Teens at Penns Grove High School

For many participants, trying new foods is a path to discovering something that they like, or don't like. Teen participants from Salem High School shared during a focus group that they thought some of the food was "weird" and that even though they cooked the recipes, some participants refused to try the completed recipes because they had vegetables in them. One participant shared, "I didn't like how every single meal had to be some weird thing; I just like normal food." This statement underscores the importance of having opportunities to try new foods at a young age, as well as the fact that not all school-aged participants are open to making changes.

For adults, trying new foods may allow them to determine if they want to purchase the food. During a focus group, the adult participant of Cooking Matters for Families shared that she

enjoyed the course because she tried recipes “I wouldn't have imagined cooking it was so interesting.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

This statement reveals the importance of HLI classes that showcase diverse recipes and allow participants to try new foods. This practice, in turn, gives participants the confidence to purchase previously unfamiliar ingredients at the store, such as canned beans or hummus. For many, trying new foods is also a budgeting concern: people do not want to spend money on food if they are uncertain whether their family will like it. Learning how to prepare as well as taste new foods is crucial to adult participants buying healthy ingredients for themselves and their families.

FINDING 4: Participants report that they enjoy the structure of the courses and appreciate the instructors.

Cooking Matters® participants report that HLI courses are fun: they engage students in the process of learning nutrition information. During an interview, an administrator from Salem Special Services described the courses as “integrative.” The structure of HLI courses, their use of hands-on facilitation techniques means that participants are “doing” rather than simply observing. For adults who are not often in classroom settings, the fact the classes do not “feel like school” is important:

“The teachers were very nice and they helped us; they broke everything down to the last. I would definitely recommend it.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)



The visual, kinesthetic, and sensory aspects of class participation are fun and valuable to children and adults alike. As one teen participant shared during a focus group, “I like being creative; the Food Bank comes up with creative stuff, not just like basic things.” (Penns Grove High School)

Focus group participants reported that the classes were fun:

"They were cool. We could laugh we can talk to them, we could make jokes around them it was fun." (Teen, Salem High School)

"I like the course because it's fun, because you get to cook with your friends and learn new stuff and be sociable. I think it's just a good experience overall." (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

Focus group participants also shared that the fun and creative aspects of the courses made it easier to learn new things:

"It's good to be with your friends but you also get to just like learn new recipes." (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

"I think the whole thing of changing your ideas and going healthier and not eating unhealthy foods was a great thing." (Teen, Salem High School)



Figure 9: Participants of Cooking Matters for Teens at Salem Special Services

From learning new things, changes can grow: *“You get to take things home with you and help to open up your life so when you grow up you know what to do.”* (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

Instructors distinguish themselves through at-ease and welcoming approaches and generosity with time and knowledge. Participants expressed that they felt the instructors valued their previous life experiences and recognized their existing knowledge:

“Their kindness and their belief that every family is equal and treating everybody with respect is so valuable. And surprisingly that is not something that you always find. They were very at ease and welcoming with everybody which was awesome to see.”
(Administrator, Riverview Family Success Center)

Section Four: Other Reported Impacts

FINDING 5: Participants report sharing information and/or cooking recipes at home after taking courses.



HLI programs in schools and community centers can influence nutrition activities in the home. Child and teenage focus group participants reported trying recipes they learned during class at home and with friends. The provided food gave them an incentive to test the recipes at home. A focus group participant from Penns Grove High School shared that she used to make sandwiches with just ham and cheese. After the course, she went home and showed her family how to make healthy grilled cheese.

For some teens, trying a recipe at home was also an opportunity to cook with caregivers and to be in the kitchen together. “I showed my parents what I made [and I am] using the kitchen at home more.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School) A teen from

Salem High School mentioned that her mom “loved every single recipe.” This same participant has cooked one of the recipes (the grilled cheese sandwich) several times at home and “it was really, really good.” She also made a healthy pizza at home with ingredients left over from the class.

Our focus group participant also described how recipes are shared with other family members:

“I shared what I learned with my aunt and my nephew. He came out to one of the classes with me and he went home and prepared a meal because they would provide us with a bag so we could go home and try it on our own. So he went home and he fixed his Grandmom one of the meals we had in class.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families).

FINDING 6: HLI course strengthen efforts in the community to reduce nutrition insecurity.

HLI classes are arranged through partnerships between FBSJ and organizations serving southern NJ residents in need. HLI classes are open to the people served by these organizations. Collaborations provide a space for skill sharing and a way for community partners to showcase what they do well.

Data from interviews with site administrators reveals that partners see the relationship with FBSJ as an asset for their constituencies. FBSJ creates responsive programs in collaboration with their partners. An administrator from Riverview Family Services shared:

“They were very prepared, very professional. They made everything so easy for us just in them being so prepared and coming in, setting up and cleaning up. They provided their own volunteers too which was really helpful [...] it is not always super easy to get a good fit and they were right from the start awesome. They would even provide the food for the recipes for the families to take home with them so they could cook the recipe at home too, which you don't come by at all with any other program. And the families just loved it. I know that everybody loved it. Even folks who weren't in the class would walk by the door and be like, ‘What are they doing? We want to do that too!’ Which is the best kind of thing that we can have because that grows people coming to workshops later.”

During a focus group at Penn’s Grove, participants agreed that the best part of the course was “sharing.” Participants in a Cooking Matters for Families course also articulated that one of the unique and most memorable parts of the course was “working together”:

“This course was more of a communal recipe, so everybody worked together, there was a lot of interaction with us too. [It is important] to get out of that social isolation, being able to come and talk with other families and be integrated and interacting with other families not just your own.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

An administrator from Salem Special Services corroborated that FBSJ approaches teachers in a “friendly and professional manner” which allows “everyone’s needs to be heard and taken into consideration.”

Section Five: Participants’ Perceptions of Challenges

FINDING 7: Participants report challenges to making nutrition changes.

In discussing the ways that HLI courses inspired them to make nutrition changes, focus group participants also articulated the challenges that they face when attempting to make these changes. Some of these challenges are ones that many people face, such as breaking individual eating habits and making healthy choices even when other family members do not make the same choices. Other challenges are more specific to people who live in an area where there are less healthy food options.

Habit and taste

When asked what makes it challenging to make nutrition changes, many focus group participants mentioned that it is difficult to eliminate unhealthy foods from their diets because of taste:

“Even from childhood, if you grew up eating cookies and cakes and now it's like ‘No you need to eat fruit!’ Changing that makes it hard.” (Teen, Penns Grove High School)

“You have habits for a long time that are hard to change at first.” (Child, Cooking Matters for Families).

Another focus group participant shared that “sticking with it” is the biggest challenge:

“It's really hard because say you're on that path to eating healthy foods and then your friend is like, ‘Well, I got some ice cream you want some of it? Do you want to come over and eat ice cream?’ You want to be like, ‘Well, I'm on a diet,’ but it's really hard.” (Teen, Salem High School)

Cost, access, and time

Many Salem residents rely on corner stores for groceries and quick meals. While some corner stores have fresh fruits and vegetables, many do not. Although focus group participation was limited, our one adult participant described the food environment in Salem County.

“I think sometimes it is access. There is one grocery store here so if you don't have transportation to go outside, you have to pay the prices that are within where you are and then some of the food and things that you might be trying may or may not be accessible through some of these stores.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

“There are no farmers’ markets within in town, if you don't have transportation you are stuck, you have to get what is here.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

Even armed with nutrition information, finances play a part in decision-making. The same participant focus group participant opinioned:

“Some people are less fortunate. Some of the things that maybe I could get somebody who is less fortunate may not. So money could be an issue.” (Riverview, Cooking Matters for Families)

Other focus group participants cited time as a major factor in their decisions around purchasing and preparing food:

“Some working parents they will get home and run to McDonalds, a fast food restaurant, or throw something together that is not healthy.” (Adult, Cooking Matters for Families)

The need for support

Focus group participants shared what they thought might help them to make nutrition changes, including the ability to try new foods. Consider a focus group conversation between teens from Penns Grove High School:

Focus group facilitator: *“What might help you to make healthy nutrition changes?”*

Participant #1: *“It might make it easier to make changes to think about the health benefits. It might make it easier to have a supportive system and if you know the consequences, the pros and cons of what you eat.”*

Participant #2: *“And your family also has to be committed to making changes, so your parents and brother and stuff have to be committed, so they can pitch in and help, to start to buy and eat healthier at home”*

Participant #3: *“Trying new foods can help because you know more recipes and what to choose from.”*

Teens at Salem High School agree that it is easier to make changes “when you have someone to do it with.”

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS, BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ANALYSIS

Impact of HLI curriculum

Data suggests that HLI classes are welcome opportunities for participants to learn about basic nutrition in an accessible way.

Strengths and challenges

HLI courses attempt to meet participants “where they are at,” meaning that programs intend to work with the challenges that exist for many people who live in Salem, NJ. The challenges that participants articulated during focus groups are the very ones that FBSJ already strives to address in its programming, such as providing food samples to taste, ingredient to bring home, money cards and quick and easy-to-replicate recipes.

FBSJ’s ability to partner with community organizations, schools, and other entities to intervene at strategic access points is a strength of its programming. Their approach of meeting community partners “where they are at” is a respectful practice and one that partners appreciate. Realistically, this approach also means that partners’ available resources impact FBSJ HLI courses. This is most apparent in recruitment; FBSJ relies on partners to advertise courses and secure enough participants for courses to run successfully. Attendance can become trickier with after-school courses for teens, some of who may have conflicting commitments or no transportation. According to conversations with community site staff, the process of gaining sufficient attendance can be challenging. While focus group participants express a desire for more course and express interest in attending multiple courses, recruitment for new participants remains challenging due to the same challenges that participants express, such as lack of transportation or lack of time.

Best Practices

Taken together, the findings detailed above reveal that FBSJ engages “best practices” in the development, design, delivery, and oversight of strategic programming intended to provide nutrition awareness and improve health among the impoverished communities it serves.

Development

- 1) FBSJ engages existing community strengths to advance shared goals with partnering institutions.
- 2) FBSJ works with partners to determine how to best serve their constituencies.

Design

- 3) FBSJ creates programs to address structural challenges posed by participants' limited access to healthy food-buying options (such as few full-service grocery stores and fresh-food stands). Participants use nutrient dense ingredients including fresh produce, whole grains, and lean dairy products during classes and demonstrations.
- 4) FBSJ creates programs to address social and economic barriers faced by local community members. These barriers include lower household income, long-working hours, and limited access to nutrition education opportunities. Recipes are intended to be low-cost and easy to replicate. Participants also receive food to take home.

Delivery

- 5) FBSJ programs are delivered to meet participants "where they are at." Programs provide information in accessible ways using accessible language and all programs contain an experiential component.
- 6) FBSJ instructors utilize facilitation skills that help participants feel comfortable and respected.

Oversight

- 7) FBSJ collects pre and post survey data from participants in multiple-week courses and assembles an end-of-course report for each class that highlights successes and challenges.

Recommendations

Below are eight recommendations that emerged from the analysis of data.

PROGRAM DESIGN

- 1) Consider having course participants recommend topics of interest. This can be done through a one-time brainstorming session, or over time as participants' interests emerge and develop in response to FBSJ programming. Adding opportunities for participants to suggest topics could enhance a responsive curriculum that is audience-specific. As well, it could create additional opportunities for parents to share perspectives and tips with one another and to strengthen a sense of community. Participants can provide other participants with support while making nutrition changes.
- 2) Consider expanding curriculum to include more advanced courses for adult participants who have completed "beginner" courses or who have more healthy nutrition experience/s. As with last year's evaluation, participants unanimously agreed that they would recommend FBSJ courses to other participants. This year, participants also expressed interest in building upon skills beyond one or two courses. FBSJ could consider creating a certificate program in which

participants work towards taking different classes, or an incentive system where adult graduates of a course can then assist in program delivery. Teens who participate in YNOT courses reported enjoying demonstrating what they have learned for other teens and for public audiences. This may hold true for adult participants as well.

Sequential courses may also help participants sustain changes over a longer period of time, and for the Food Bank to better track what challenges and successes participants face as they implement more permanent nutrition changes.

3) Consider having participants add “goals” to the courses. At the start of a course, participants could share nutrition challenges or specific aspects of health that they would like to change or improve over the course of the class. Self-directed goals could inform course content as well as provide motivation for participants. These “intent-to-change variables” could also provide another data point for evaluation- a way to gauge whether courses are helping participants meet their nutrition goals.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

4) Consider advertising classes and courses outside of specific sites. Participants requested more classes and often suggested adding elements to the courses they completed that are already part of other courses. These recommendations suggest that participants would engage in multiple courses for themselves and/or their families given the opportunity. As well, existing participants expressed that they did not know about other Food Bank activities or courses that happen in their communities.

5) Continue creative incentives. As mentioned above, while participants express interest in more classes, ensuring adequate participation in new courses remains challenging. FBSJ attempts to encourage participation through incentives such as providing food cards, ingredients, and cookbooks. Participants mention appreciating these benefits and see them as positive aspects of the course.

PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

6) Consider beginning the external evaluation process earlier in the fiscal year to ensure comprehensive focus group data. Staff turnover, school testing, end-of-year events, and competing priorities make scheduling focus groups and ensuring adequate participation in the focus groups challenging. Lengthening time for data collection and allowing time for follow-up with different sites could improve the qualitative data collection process.

7) Continue to collect survey data to capture immediate impressions about HLI courses. Survey data can be examined in relation to qualitative data from focus groups to determine the reasons why participants attended each type of course. As well, survey data—if examined systematically—could clarify what percent of participants complete courses, whether this varies

by course, by site, or by demographic characteristics of participants. Having clearer information about who the participants are in each course will make generalizations and interpretations of impact and outcomes more meaningful. With this data, participants can be better selected for qualitative focus groups, interviews or case studies that address the specific courses and topics they encountered. As well, this data could inform targeted outreach should the Food Bank decide to expand its curriculum.

8) While it is clear from focus group data that participants **retain** nutrition information from courses and demonstration, it is less clear how this information results (or doesn't) in **behavioral changes over time**. In addition to the pre and post survey, FBSJ could introduce a further follow-up assessment three or six months after the course is completed to determine longevity of potential changes. FBSJ could utilize information obtained through pre and post surveys and a later follow-up assessment to help determine the impact of classes on participants over time.

Concluding Comments

As documented in the findings presented above, participants have positive perceptions of HLI classes and demonstrations provided by FBSJ. Focus group participants report learning new nutrition information such as the importance of healthy eating, label reading, and portion control. Learning new information, in turn, has resulted in behavioral changes after the courses such as eating healthier snacks or reducing salt intake. These behaviors have been proven to reduce food insecurity and improve overall health. These results indicate that FBSJ supports programs and policies that improve nutrition activity among Salem County's children, educators, and caregivers. HLI courses contribute to efforts to improve food security and increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables among lower-income, food insecure Salem County residents.

APPENDICES

Appendix #1: Participant Recommendations (organized by site)

PENNS GROVE HIGH SCHOOL

More hands-on activities, like competitions or a cook-off

More recipes in a healthy way, we should cook more recipes like dinner, like a full meal

We should cook breakfast

Cooking quick breakfasts, because I don't have time for a long breakfast

Other drinks instead of soda

Learn to make other things rather than one specific thing, like a meal

Healthy desserts, like milkshakes

Costumes, like chefs' hats, like if we are going to have a career in it

SALEM HIGH SCHOOL

Get a bus I don't feel like walking home.

Have real food, I mean like actual food I can eat.

More snacks

Have real brownies with ice cream

I wish there were more days of the program.

RIVERVIEW FAMILY SERVICES

It should be twice a week instead of once because we could do more things

A quick snack

A healthy snack

Appendix #2: Short Questionnaire Template (modified for each site).

QUESTIONNAIRE

WELCOME! Please answer the following questions.

- 1) How many children live in your household?
- 2) How many adults live in your household?
- 3) What are the most helpful things you learned in this course?
- 4) How many times each week do young children help in your home while making a meal?
Never Once a week 2-3 times 4-6 times More than 6 times
- 5) What do young children help with?
- 6) Do young children help more in the kitchen since you took this course?

YES NO

7) How often do teenagers help in your home while making a meal?

8) What do teenagers help with?

9) Do teenagers help more in the kitchen since you took this course?

YES NO

10) Have you tried any new foods at home since taking these classes?

YES NO

If yes, what have you tried?

11) Have you changed any shopping habits because of these classes?

YES NO

If yes, what are you doing differently?

12) Have you changed any cooking habits because of these classes??

YES NO

If yes, what are you doing differently?

13) Have you changed any eating habits because of these classes??

YES NO

If yes, what are you doing differently?

14) How easy is it for you to make changes in your shopping, cooking, or eating?

Very Easy Somewhat Easy In the middle Somewhat Difficult Very Difficult

15) Did you share what you learned in these classes with other people in your life?

YES NO

16) Do you like the format of classes?

YES NO

17) Do you have any other comments?

Appendix #3: Basic Focus Group Template (modified significantly for each focus group based on curriculum.)

General retention

What do you remember the best from the course? What really stands out?

What did you enjoy the most?

What do you remember learning about MyPlate?

Recipes

What recipes do you remember?

What recipe/s did you like the most? Why?

Have you made the recipe again or used it in your teaching? Why or why not?

Label reading

What do you remember learning about label reading? Why is it important?

Did you read labels before the course? Do you read labels now? When and how often?

Healthy shopping, cooking, eating

Do you think that you **shop** healthier since taking this course?

In what ways? If no, why not?

Do you **buy** different foods since taking this course?

If yes, what is different? If no, why not?

Do you think that you **cook** healthier since taking this course?

In what ways? If no, why not?

Do you **cook** different meals since taking this course?

If yes, what is different?

Do you think that you **eat** healthier since taking this course?

In what ways? If no, why not?

Do you **eat** different foods since taking this course?

Do you **buy, cook or eat** different snacks or beverages since taking this course? If yes, what is different?

Do you swap out foods that are less healthy for healthier options? Like what?

What about portion control? Has this changed?

Has anything else changed about how you buy, cook, or eat food?

Food resource management

Before taking this course, did you plan your meals ahead of time or make shopping lists?

Has this changed since taking this course?

What do you remember learning about choosing best-priced forms of fruits and vegetables?

Do you feel more confident that you can cook and buy healthier food on a budget since taking this course?

What about “stretching” ingredients?

Family

Do you think what you learned during the course has impacted your family in any way?

How do you think your children have been impacted by you taking this course? How do you think your family has been impacted by your child taking this course?

Shopping? Do you involve kids or other family members?

Cooking?

Eating?

What happens when you eat away from home?

Did you share what you learned in the course with others?

Course format and style

What did you think about the form and style of the course?

What worked well for you?

What would you change?

Would you recommend this class to someone else?

Do you have any other comments?

Behavior change based on MyPlate

Have you increased your fruit and vegetable consumption?

Have you increased your whole grains consumption?

Have you reduced your sugars consumption?

How confident are you that you can discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy fats?

Do you prepare recipes using herbs and spices instead of salt?

Do you prepare recipes with foods from multiple food groups?

Do you prepare recipes with different forms of fruits and vegetables?

Pros and cons of fresh, frozen, and canned?

How confident are you that you can identify healthy beverages?

How often do you practice proper hand washing?

How often do you practice basic knife safety?

Challenges

What do you think are the biggest nutrition challenges for local families in general?

What do you think families do well in meeting these nutrition challenges?

Where do you think most people shop? What is it like to try and get healthy foods in local neighborhoods?

What do you think are the biggest challenges to buying nutritious food?

What do you think are the biggest challenges to preparing nutritious food?

What do you think are the biggest challenges to changing the way that we shop and eat?

What changes do you think would help kids be healthier? How could this happen?

What do you think about nutrition at the school? What would make it better?

What gets parents involved?

Did this course help you think about how to teach nutrition in the classroom? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

