

OUTREACH INCENTIVE GRANT FUNDING: END-OF-YEAR PROJECT REPORT

Title: Development of a Culinary Curriculum to Improve the Diet and Behaviors of Children that Participate in Second Harvest's Kid Cafe Program

Name: Carol Costello Project Date: March/April 2011

Assessment and Partnership – this project worked very closely with Second Harvest staff and two of their agencies, SOAR (Saving Others and Reconciling) and Lighthouse at Austin Homes. We had one other agency involved at the beginning and with the focus group, but due to illness of the director, Mt. Moriah did not participate in the actual curriculum with the children. We heard very positive comments from the Second Harvest staff as they participated in the focus groups and came to the training of the cooks to learn how to prepare the healthier foods. They furnished all the food for the classes to the agencies. The most important comments were from the children that loved cooking the 3 lessons and learning about new foods.

We utilized the kitchen at Jessie Harris building to train the cooks and we held the focus groups for the directors and cooks at the Second Harvest offices. Two Nutrition graduate students visited the two agencies for 3 weeks to observe the cooking and to collect the data.

Benefits – Second Harvest greatly benefitted from this project as now they have 2 weeks of menus and recipes that incorporate vegetables into the children's diets. Second Harvest is trying to increase the nutritional value of the food that the cooks prepare for the Kid's Café. By making the food prep fun with new vegetables, the kids enjoyed new foods that they were not familiar with. Second Harvest will furnish the recipes to all of their Kid's Cafes. The researchers benefitted by hosting the focus group and finding out about the needs of different feeding agencies in East Tennessee. Everyone was very appreciative to be allowed to participate and had good suggestions on how to make this work. The implementation also was an interesting learning experience. We had some poor communication initially and had trouble getting informed consents back from the parents. We believe we have learned how to minimize the confusion in the future.

Shared Decision-Making – our focus group with Second Harvest staff, the directors of the agencies, and the cooks from the agencies allowed for input into this project. Their advice was invaluable and we would suggest that a similar process be used in the future for projects similar to ours.

Scholarship - we collected 30 informed consents from the parents that allowed us to do the baseline measurements and we were able to assess on follow-up 23 children. Of the 30 children, the mean age was 10.3 +/- 1.9 yrs of age; 53% were female; 70% African American, 3% American Indian, and 27% Caucasian; 3% Hispanic. Of the 10 vegetables on the list that the children had to identify, 80% or more recognized at baseline 6 of the 10 vegetables. Those that were not recognized by 80% of the kids were celery, squash, lettuce (that was a picture issue – some said cabbage), and snap peas.

Based on the data we collected, it appears that the children that are eating at the Kid's Cafes represent an underserved group that also have been shown to be at a greater risk for overweight or obesity. By allowing these children to interact with healthier vegetables and learn how to prepare them, we have an opportunity to make an impact in their eating patterns.

Conclusions – working with Second Harvest is a rewarding experience. They need so much community support, it is great to offer them the menus and recipes to help the children eat more healthy. This has been a goal of Second Harvest, and we contributed to this in a way that can be reproducible. The children enjoyed making the new foods and learning about items they were not familiar with. By teaching culinary skills, we can make a longer impact than traditional nutritional education. The focus group was

instrumental in the success of this project. It is a best practice that should be used in similar projects. Getting the buy-in at the beginning and asking for their advice, made them excited about the project and made the implementation easier for our research team.

Future Plans – we will continue to work with Second Harvest on any new recipes that they want generated. I am on the Board of this organization and they do not hesitate contacting me for help. Kid's Café is a very worthy program that supports feeding children that may not be able to get food at their homes. It is important that we teach these children how to prepare healthier foods that they can learn to like and incorporate into their lives.