

ABSTRACT

Background

In the past, food pantries have been shown to be unable to support healthy diets. Similarly, the overall dietary intake of most food pantry users does not meet recommendations. However, registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) working in food banks have been able to lead efforts to increase healthy food access and nutrition education. Metro Caring, an anti-hunger center in Denver, CO, is unique amongst the surrounding food pantries in that it implements nutritional requirements, such as sugar guidelines, for the resources it provides. Metro Caring's staff includes an RDN and dietetic technician registered (DTR) who oversee nutrition programs involving dozens of volunteer nutrition educators from various backgrounds, from dietitians to former or current program participants. The goal of these programs is to encourage and make accessible healthy lifestyles.

Objective

This study is the first phase of quality improvement measures to evaluate the effectiveness of two of the programs currently available at Metro Caring - the Healthy Tastings (HT) recipe demonstrations and Food For Thought (FFT) nutrition education activities.

Design

Over a three-week course, phone call surveys were attempted for every person who visited Metro Caring during that time. Anonymous surveys were conducted 0-2 days after appointments and consisted of 11 distinct questions with several sub-questions. Responses were recorded and later coded into categorical groups, subjective to the answers that were collected and based on common themes of the free-answer responses. Limitations included individuals who were at work during time of phone call, non-English speakers, and those with unlisted phone numbers.

Results

181 surveys were ultimately collected, 94 of which participated in at least one of the programs. Notable results concluded that around 30% of individuals who did not participate in the programs were simply unaware of their existence. Additionally, participants of both programs experienced a significant increase in Stage of Change regarding healthy eating/nutritional education when compared before and after interaction with the programs. Finally, more than a third of participants did not create a goal for behavior change as a result of these programs.

Conclusion

Future efforts should increase active recruitment to involve participants with these programs, based on feedback. A major shortcoming was identified with failure to meet one of the program aims, "goal creation for positive lifestyle changes"; volunteers should be trained to provide more assistance in this area, discussing and encouraging goal formation during the interaction. Results from this study will be shared back to nutrition educators at Metro Caring to improve and adjust the programs and volunteer training. This survey should be repeated as necessary to track implemented changes.