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2016 Food, Friends, and Health: An Evaluation of North County Senior Connections Thyme Together Food Truck Lunch Program

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FOOD, FRIENDS, AND HEALTH: An Evaluation of North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program

April 2016



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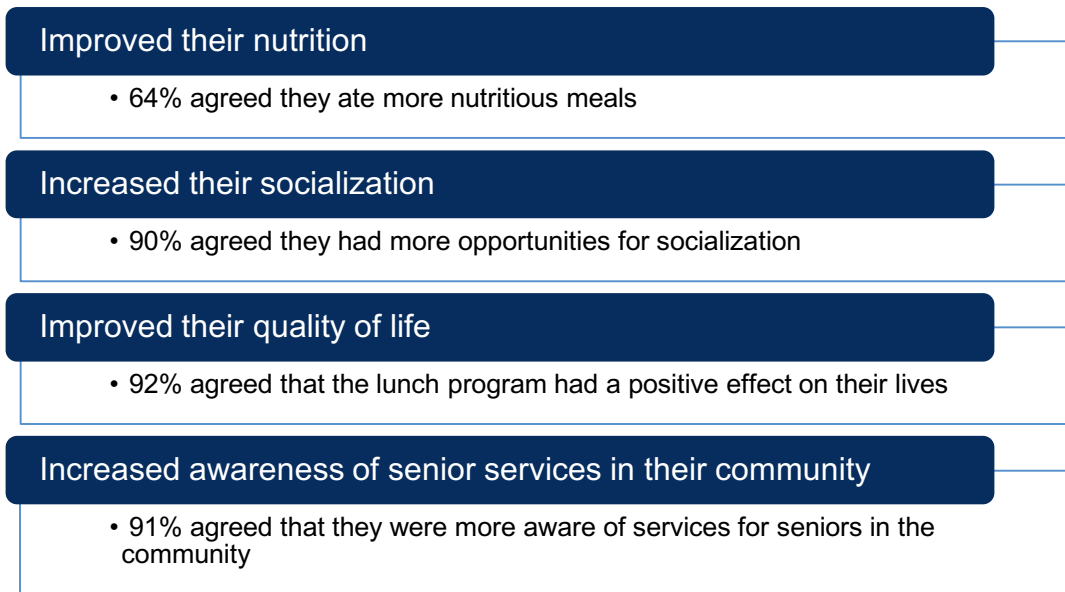
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program (subsequently referred to as NCSC) is a collaborative project initiated in November 2014 that provides affordable, nutritious lunches, recreational programming, and community information to seniors in the northern region of San Diego County (North County). The program was developed and funded as a result of a 2014 needs assessment and asset mapping initiative, which found that many seniors in North County had limited support systems, were not financially secure, lacked access to nutritious food, and were not likely to travel to existing senior lunch programs throughout North County.¹

In May 2015, six months after NCSC launched, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation commissioned the University of San Diego's Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center) to: 1) evaluate NCSC's progress towards meeting its objectives, and 2) provide feedback and recommendations for programmatic changes as necessary. This report presents the findings from the first 17 months of a three-year evaluation. Below are the key findings.

Outcomes and Impact on Seniors

Findings suggest NCSC has made progress towards meeting its four objectives. According to survey results and focus groups with senior participants, the majority felt that since attending NCSC they:



¹ Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research. (2014). North County Senior Connections: Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping. University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

Implementation Lessons

Although NCSC is clearly making a positive difference in the lives of seniors, the findings from observations and participant feedback uncovered areas for programmatic improvement. Adopting the following recommendations will likely further increase NCSC's impact on seniors in North County.

- Identify seniors who have the greatest economic need and want to attend lunch, but may not be able to access the program sites
- Clarify roles of staff, volunteers, and interns
- Increase dependability and consistency of food quality
- Order and serve food in an efficient way
- Ensure consistent high-quality presentations
- Fix program software glitches and reconcile discrepancies to ensure accurate and reliable program data
- Market to increase daily participation rates and number of seniors served
- Ensure systems and staffing have capacity for increased attendance

NCSC has developed a strong program that has enriched the lives of seniors in North County. The lunch program's success is a direct result of the continuous collaboration of each of its partners. This evaluation will hopefully serve as a catalyst for the partner organizations to continue to collaborate and reflect on ways to refine NCSC's existing services and expand its reach to more seniors.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program (subsequently referred to as NCSC) is a collaborative project initiated in November 2014 that provides affordable, nutritious lunches, recreational programming and, community information to seniors in the northern region of San Diego County (North County). The program was developed and funded as a result of a 2014 needs assessment and asset mapping initiative, which found that many seniors in North County had limited support systems, were not financially secure, lacked access to nutritious food, and were not likely to travel to existing senior lunch programs throughout North County.²

NCSC is based on the premise that healthy aging depends upon seniors having access to nutritious food and opportunities to socialize and connect with others. Thus, NCSC's specific objectives for the target population of seniors (age 55+) in North County San Diego are to:



² Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research. (2014). North County Senior Connections: Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping. University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

The *Thyme Together* food truck, operated by Dreams for Change (DfC), travels five days a week to five sites in North County. For \$2.00 per lunch, seniors can choose from eight menu options, including a weekly special (see Appendix A for the current menu). All meals are made to order, allowing seniors to make special requests to accommodate food allergies or health conditions. In addition to an extensive menu, San Diego Food Bank North County warehouse and Dickerson Farms provide fresh produce for seniors to take with them to supplement and nutritionally improve meals prepared at home.

Interfaith Community Services (ICS) manages the operations of the lunch program at all sites, including marketing, registration, volunteer coordination, and coordinating recreational or educational presentations for the seniors during lunch. Volunteers at each site take orders and deliver lunch to seniors while seniors socialize. Social work interns from California State University San Marcos, and managed by DfC, are also available to offer case management services for seniors if they indicate a need for additional support. At the conclusion of each lunch, there is a drawing for seniors to win grocery store gift cards.

**Collaboration and Collective Impact:
Working Together to Provide Food, Friendship, and Health
to Seniors in North County San Diego**

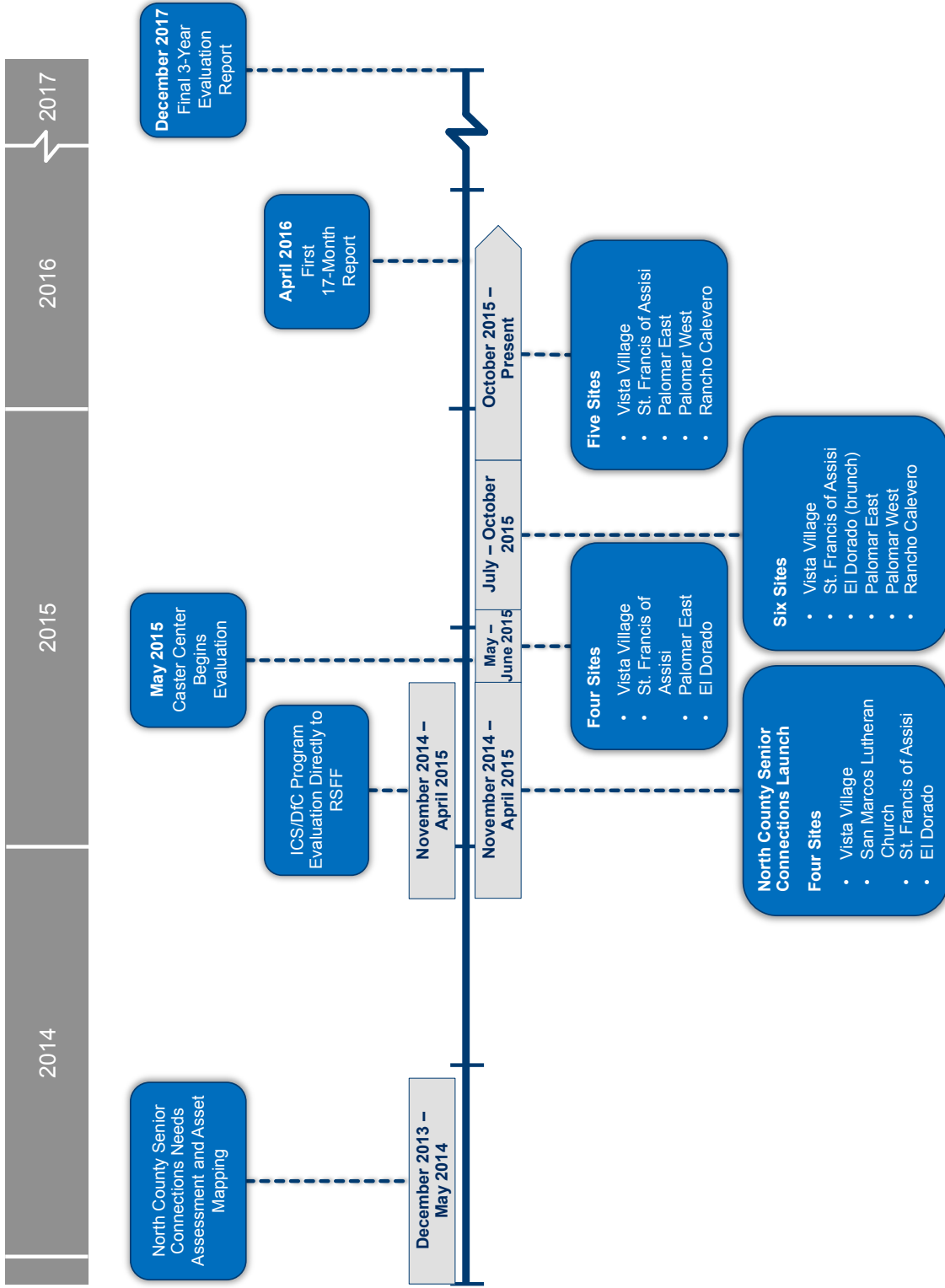
Dreams for Change (DfC)	Provides menu planning, food preparation, meal service, and food truck maintenance; tracks meals served; oversees social work interns
Interfaith Community Services (ICS)	Communicates with and tracks senior participants; serves as a liaison between NCSC and host sites; coordinates volunteers and onsite activities
Cal State San Marcos Social Work Program	Provides social work interns each semester
San Diego Food Bank North County Warehouse	Provides fresh produce
Dickerson Farms	Provides fresh produce
Produce Good	Provided initial volunteer support planning
Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center)	Provides NCSC program evaluation services to RSFF
Rancho Santa Fe Foundation (RSFF)	Provides NCSC funding for 3 years

In May 2015, six months after NCSC launched, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation commissioned the University of San Diego's Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center) to conduct a program evaluation of the three-year pilot program (from November 2014 through November 2017). The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Evaluate NCSC's progress towards meeting its objectives; and
- Provide feedback and recommendations for programmatic changes as necessary.

The overall NCSC evaluation plan is illustrated in the NCSC/*Thyme Together* Logic Model in Appendix B. The timeline presented on page 10 summarizes key program and evaluation components over the three-year timeframe. This report presents the findings from the first 17 months (November 2014 through March 2016).

NCSC Program Evaluation Timeline



Notes:

At the November 2014 launch, NCSC was operating at four sites. It expanded to five sites in October 2015. For several months, there were six sites, including brunch on Wednesdays at the El Dorado Mobile Home Park, but this was discontinued in October 2015 because of low attendance. In September 2015, fresh produce distribution began.

EVALUATION DATA SOURCES

The findings presented in this report are based on the following:

Program Services Data: The Caster Center Evaluation Team (Evaluation Team) collected monthly reports from ICS and DfC that included daily, weekly, and monthly counts of number of meals provided, number of seniors served, and number of presentations offered. ICS and DfC also provided job descriptions, organizational charts, daily logs, and program reports, which were reviewed by the Evaluation Team on an ongoing basis.

Note that the data collection process began in May 2015 when the Caster Center began its formal evaluation of NCSC. Any data from the first six months of the program (i.e., November 2014 through April 2015) were provided, compiled, and reported by ICS and DfC. Also note that data provided by ICS prior to January 2016 were generated from their Service Point software, and data collected since January 2016 were generated from their new CiviCRM software. There were ongoing challenges in ensuring program service data were completely accurate because of the change in software midway through the evaluation.

Senior Survey: The Evaluation Team designed and deployed a survey to assess seniors' perceptions and attitudes towards NCSC and the program's progress towards meeting its outcomes (see Appendix C for the senior survey). The survey was administered to senior lunch attendees on two different dates at all five sites between January and March 2016. A total of 159 seniors completed the survey and the number of survey respondents at each of the five sites is summarized in Table 1. Respondents were 65% female and 28% male, and a total of 82% of the respondents indicated that they came to lunch at least 2-3 times per month. While survey results are not representative of all seniors who have attended the lunch program, they provide insight into how the program has impacted a group of participants who closely mirror the demographics of the senior attendees.

Table 1. Number of Survey Respondents by Site

Program Site	Number of Survey Respondents
Palomar West	48
Palomar East	35
Rancho Calevero	33
Vista Village	24
St. Francis of Assisi	19
Total	159

Senior and Volunteer Focus Groups: The Evaluation Team conducted focus group discussions with senior participants (n=43) and volunteers (n=17) to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences with NCSC. A total of nine focus groups (plus one personal interview) were conducted between January and March 2016 (see Table 2 for a summary of the number of participants at each of the five sites). All participants received \$10 cash as an incentive to participate.

Table 2. Number of Focus Group Participants by Site

Program Site	Senior Participants	Senior Volunteers	Grand Total
Palomar West	9	6	15
Palomar East	11	2	13
Rancho Calevero	8	5	13
Vista Village	9	1	10
St. Francis of Assisi	6	3	9
Total	43	17	60

Site Observations: The Evaluation Team visited each of the five sites at least three times between May 2015 and March 2016, and recorded their observations about different aspects of the program such as registration, meal preparation and delivery, presentation content and delivery, and interactions between staff, volunteers, social work interns, and senior participants.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

This section of the report presents NCSC’s achievements in the first 17 months (November 2014 through March 2016). These correspond to the outputs in the logic model (see Appendix B).

Program Participants

Roughly 1,200 seniors participated in NCSC from November 2014 through March 2016. Table 3 summarizes the demographic profile of program participants, and shows that the majority of participants were white females between 60 and 80 years old.

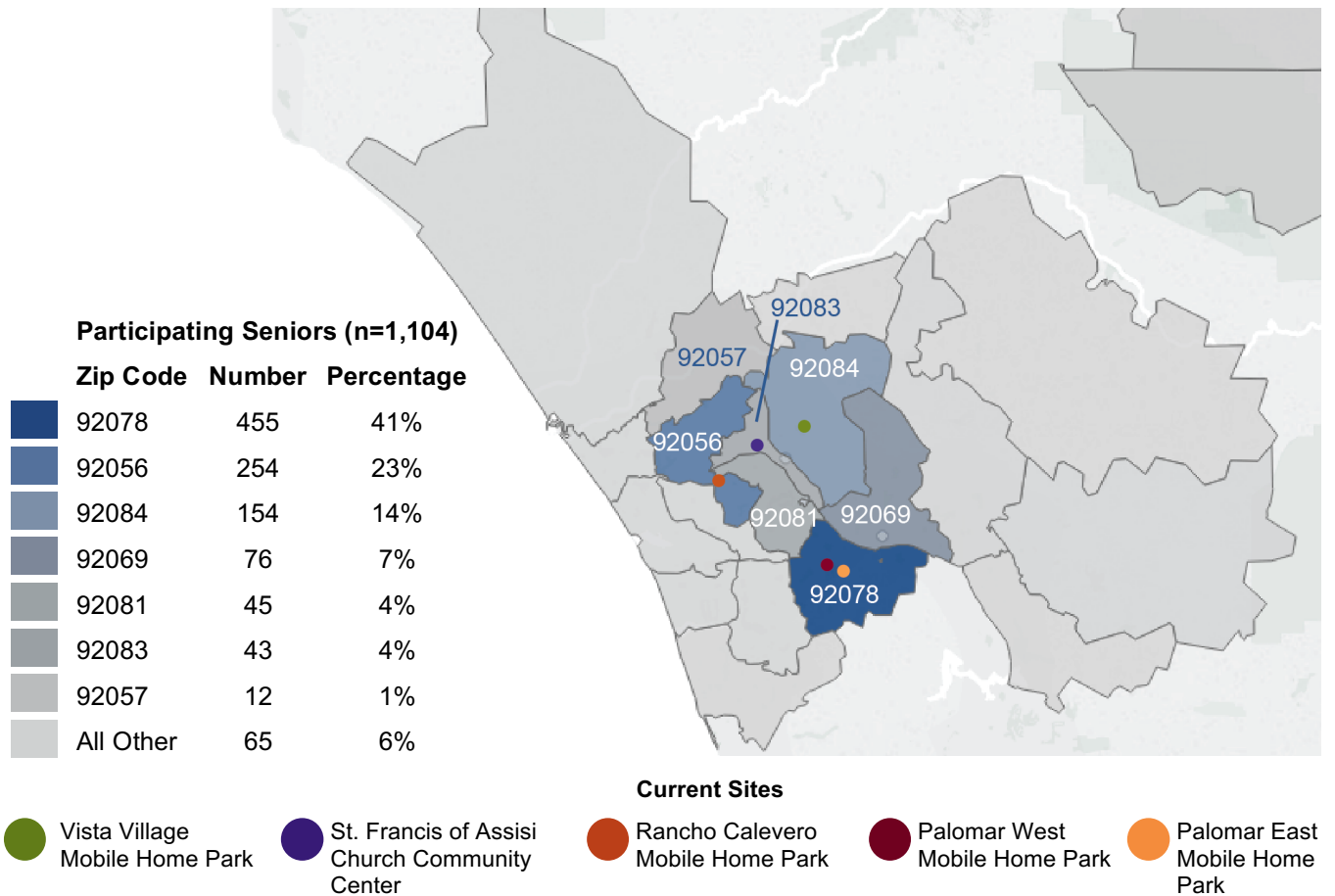
Table 3. Demographic Profile of NCSC Participants³

Demographic	Number	Percentage
Age (n=1,100)		
<50	17	2%
50-59	94	9%
60-69	319	29%
70-79	357	32%
80-89	239	22%
90-99	65	6%
>99	9	1%
Gender (n=1,103)		
Male	413	37%
Female	690	63%
Ethnicity (n=1,102)		
American Indian/Alaska Native	9	1%
Asian	33	3%
Black or African American	7	1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5	<1%
Hispanic/Latino	93	8%
White	867	78%
Other/No Response	93	8%

The map on page 14 shows the location of NSCS sites and the zip code distribution of NCSC participants.

³ The ICS database does not include demographic information for all NCSC attendees.

Location of NCSC Sites and Zip Code Distribution of NCSC Participants



Meals Served

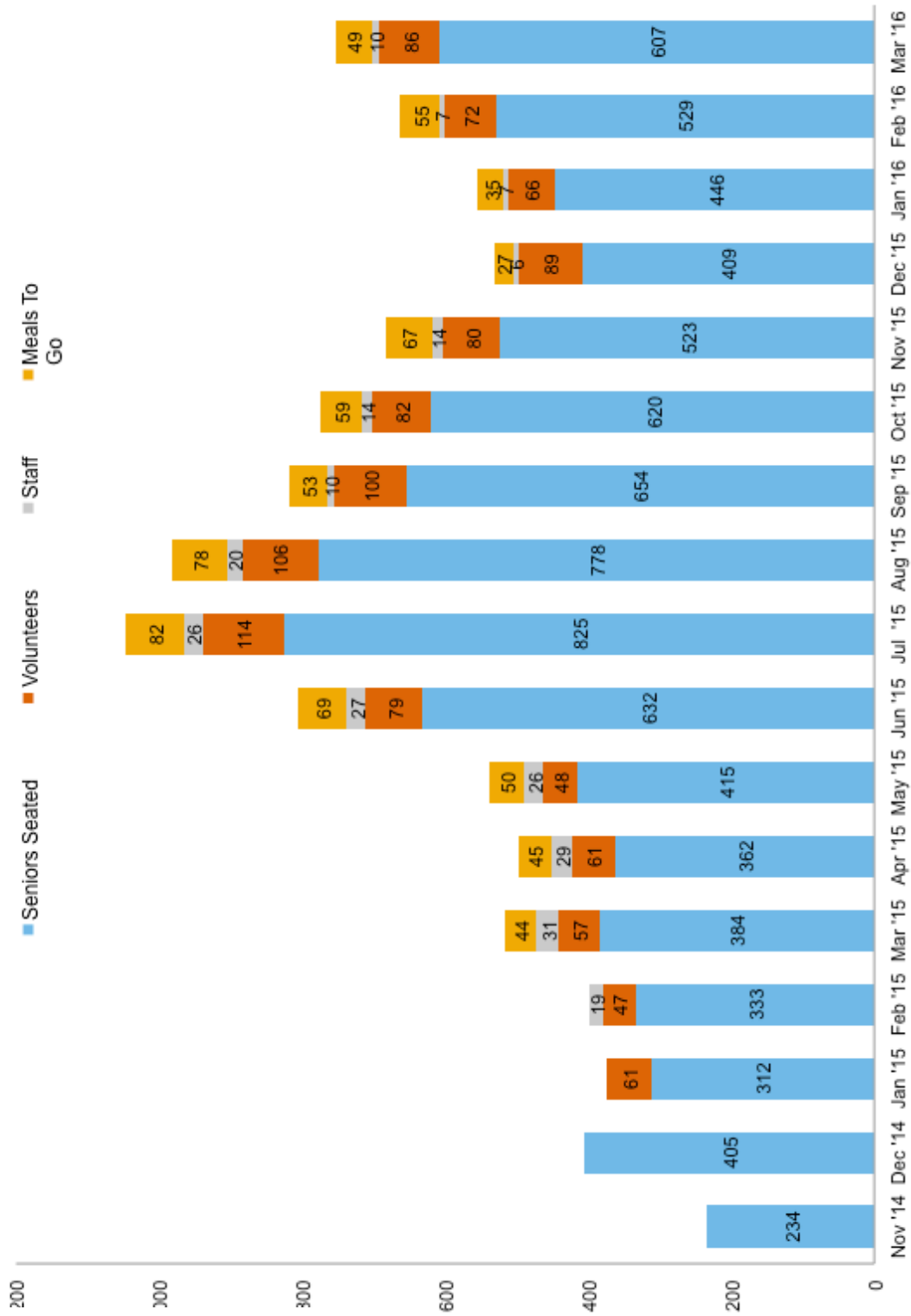
Since program inception, NCSC has served a total of 10,644 meals, or an average of 626 meals per month. Figure 1 shows the total number of meals served each month. This pace will put NCSC above the target goal of serving 15,500 meals in a 32-month timeframe.

The month with the highest number of meals served was July 2015. This was, in part, because of the shift from four sites to five sites, as well as a free lunch that was provided to new seniors as an incentive to try NCSC for the first time.

In general, there is evidence that the program has gained traction, as the number of meals served in March 2016 (752 meals) was 45% more than it was the year before (516 meals in March 2015). While there was a steady decline in numbers of meals served between July and December 2015, there was a 42% increase in meals served between December 2015 and March 2016.

Based on the current data available, it may be that November through January 2016 will continue to be lower attendance months, as this was true in 2014 and 2015.

Figure 1. Number of Meals Served From November 2014 Through March 2016⁴



⁴ Data based on Daily Tracking Workbook provided by DJC.

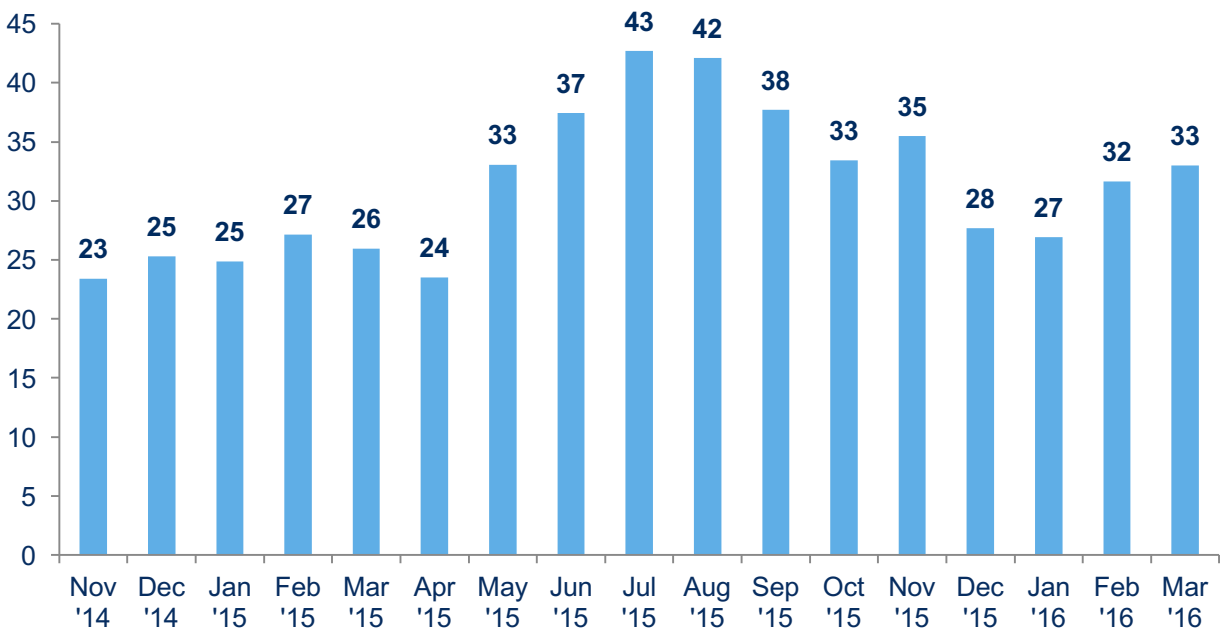
Attendance

Regular attendance is key to ensuring that seniors can reap the benefits of the program and NCSC can continue to operate cost-effectively. In addition, increasing the number of unduplicated seniors served is essential to maximizing the impact on the North County community. The following two graphs reflect progress in both areas.

Daily Average Attendance

Figure 2 shows the daily average senior attendance per month, calculated by adding the number of seniors seated plus the number of volunteers, divided by the number of service days for the month. The overall daily average attendance was 31 seniors, which is 38% below the target of 50 seniors per day.

Figure 2. Daily Average Attendance per Month⁵

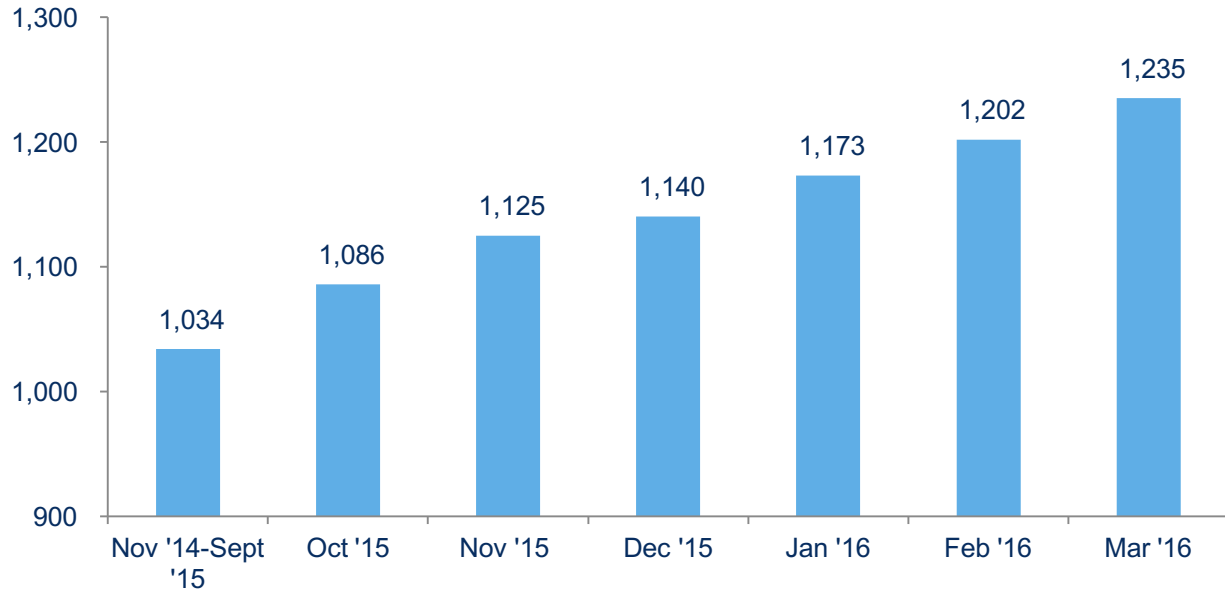


⁵ Data from DfC Tracking Workbook and ICS Daily Journal Log

Unduplicated Seniors Served

The number of unduplicated seniors has steadily increased since the program's inception. As depicted in Figure 3, a total of 1,235 unduplicated seniors have been served in the first 17 months of the program. This steady increase indicates that there are new seniors attending the lunch program each month.

Figure 3. Number of Unduplicated Seniors Served⁶



⁶ Based on ICS's Daily/Monthly Report provided to the Caster Center starting October 2015. Note that the 1,034 unduplicated seniors from November 2014 through September 2015 is an estimate, as described in the Quarter 1, 2016 Report.

Daily Presentations⁷

Between July 2015 and March 2016, a total of 188 presentations were coordinated across all five sites. Of the 188 presentations, 115 were unique and the remaining 73 presentations occurred multiple times at different sites.

The content of the presentations varied greatly, but can be organized into three main categories, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Number and Type of Presentations (From July 2015 through March 2016)

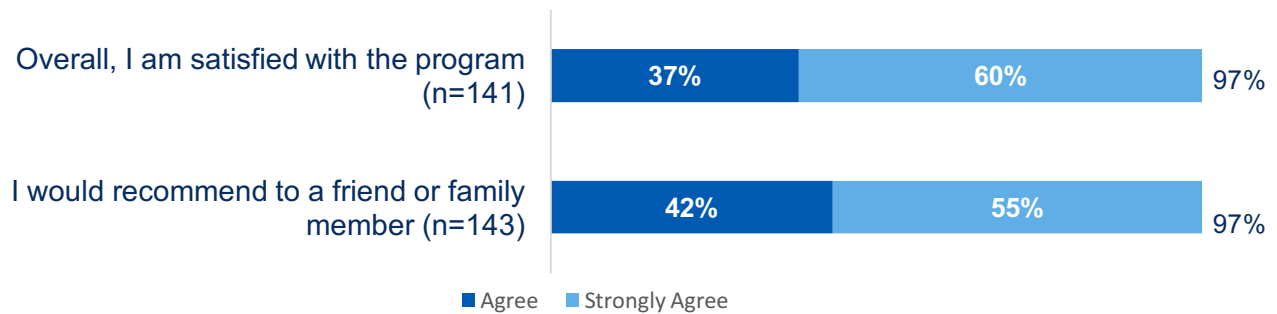
Theme	Total	Percentage	Sampling of Presentations
Health & Community Services	58	50%	Cal Fresh, Alzheimer's Association, Fire Prevention, AARP Senior Driving Classes, Senior Self Defense, Latest in Prescriptions, ICS Veterans Services, Hearing Devices, Mental Health
Recreation & Entertainment	32	28%	Boot Scootin' Dancers, Alta Vista Gardens, Butterfly Farms, Moonlight Theater, Karate, African Violets, Stamp Collecting, Sunset Strummers Ukulele Band
History & Culture	25	22%	USS Midway, Islamic Faith, Women Veterans Panel, Life in the Stone Age, Historical Newspapers and Their Stories, Patriotic Speech, History of Golf
Total	115		

⁷ While presentations have always been part of the overall program, they were not tracked until July 2015.

Participant Satisfaction

Overall, the seniors who completed the survey (n=159) were very positive about the lunch program and the impact it has had on their lives. Figure 4 indicates that virtually all (97%) of the survey respondents agreed (37%) or strongly agreed (60%) that they were satisfied with the program and would recommend NCSC to a friend or family member. This is a true testament to the quality of NCSC and the continuous improvement over the first 17 months.

Figure 4. Satisfaction Ratings



Observations and feedback from focus groups confirm satisfaction with NCSC.

"I love this program. It's the first thing I ask [my husband] while we're having coffee Thursday mornings. Lunch today?"

– Senior participant

"I always invite my friends and remind them [to come] because we don't want to lose it. We really enjoy it."

– Senior participant

"We appreciate the fact that this group [ICS and DfC] thought about us."

– Senior volunteer

Focus groups participants were asked to give one word to describe NCSC. As Figure 5 depicts, the seniors described NCSC very positively. Note that the size of the word represents how frequently the word was used.

Figure 5. Participants' Descriptions of NCSC



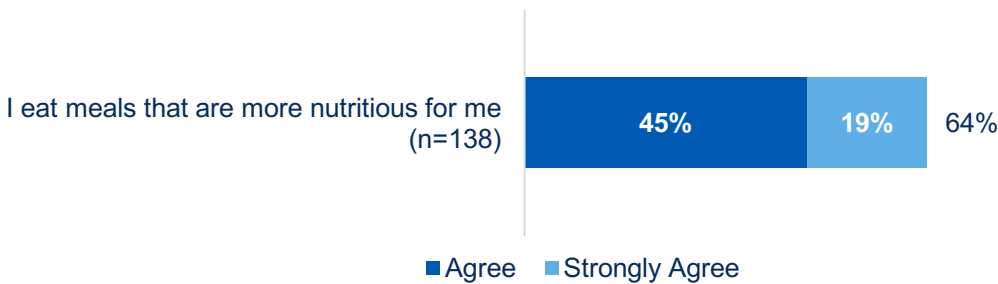
NCSC OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON SENIORS

NCSC identified four outcomes to measure its impact on seniors in North County: 1) improved nutrition, 2) increased socialization, 3) improved quality of life, and 4) increased awareness of senior services (see Appendix B for outcomes in the logic model). Progress towards these outcomes was measured through the senior survey and focus group discussions. The results for each outcome are presented below. Note that the graphs represent the opinions of only 159 (or fewer) seniors who completed the survey, and should be interpreted accordingly.

Improved Nutrition

Figure 6 shows that 64% of seniors agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (19%) that since attending NCSC they now eat meals that are more nutritious.

Figure 6. Nutrition Ratings



During the focus groups, seniors explained that the food they ate during the lunch program was more nutritious and varied than the food they typically eat at home.

"If I ate at home, it wouldn't be as nutritional. It would be out of a can."

– Senior participant

"Being by myself, I don't eat properly. When I come here, I get a nice nutritious meal."

– Senior participant

Some seniors conveyed that attending NCSC inspired them to eat healthier at home.

"Since coming to the lunch program, we have started trying to improve our eating habits. We've been making our own lunches and keep on a quality diet."

– Senior participant

One of the services NCSC offers to seniors to improve nutrition was access to produce provided by the San Diego Food Bank North County warehouse and Dickerson Farms. When this feature was first added (September 2015), the produce was provided sporadically and was placed in large bins where it was difficult for seniors to see. Consequently, seniors did not take the produce home with them. However, in Quarter 1, 2016, DfC staff labeled the produce and displayed it aesthetically near the exit for seniors to remember to take it with them as they leave. In addition, DfC staff made announcements about the produce, provided preparation instructions on a white board, and verbally explained to seniors how to prepare the produce. As a result, there has been an observable increase in the amount of produce seniors take home. Moving forward, DfC hopes to track the amount of produce taken at each lunch.



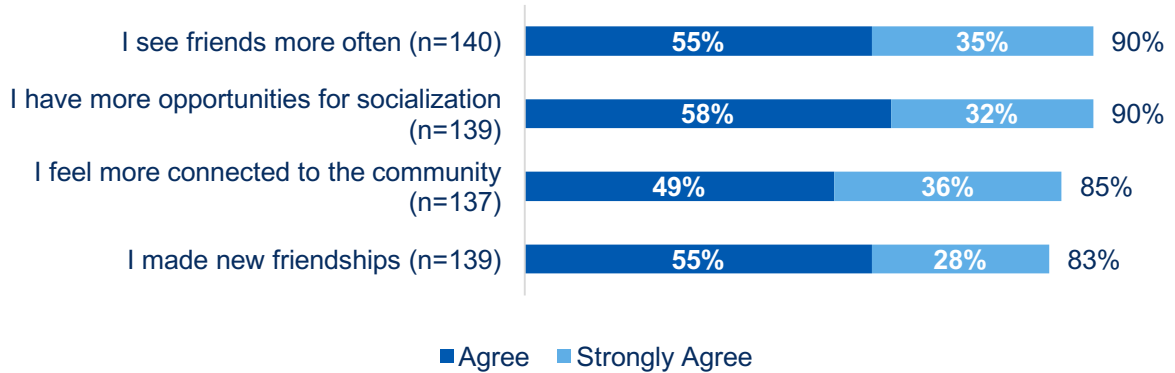
"I talked to one senior who hadn't seen white radishes since her mother's victory garden and another who had never tried a beet that didn't come from a can..."

- DfC Program Coordinator

Increased Socialization

As illustrated in Figure 7, NCSC has created a powerful opportunity for seniors to socialize and connect with friends. Nine out of ten (90%) seniors agreed or strongly agreed that since attending NCSC, they had greater opportunities for socialization and a greater ability to see friends. More than eight out of ten seniors agreed that they made new friendships (83%) and felt more connected to the community (85%) since attending NCSC.

Figure 7. Socialization Ratings



For many of the seniors who participated in the focus groups, socialization and fellowship were more important than the food. Seniors emphasized that NCSC provides a great platform for seniors to meet new people, renew and strengthen their current friendships, and give them a chance to connect with the community.



“I met so many friends and people through this program. We opened communications more in-depth rather than superficial.”

– Senior participant

“I have lived here for 15 years and I met people [through this program] I never knew.”

– Senior participant

“We know a lot of faces in the park but now we know everyone’s name here.”

– Senior participant

“I’ve met new people who are now friends.”

– Senior participant

“A lot of programs have gone away. In some ways, this program fills a gap and gives seniors a chance to socialize.”

– Senior participant

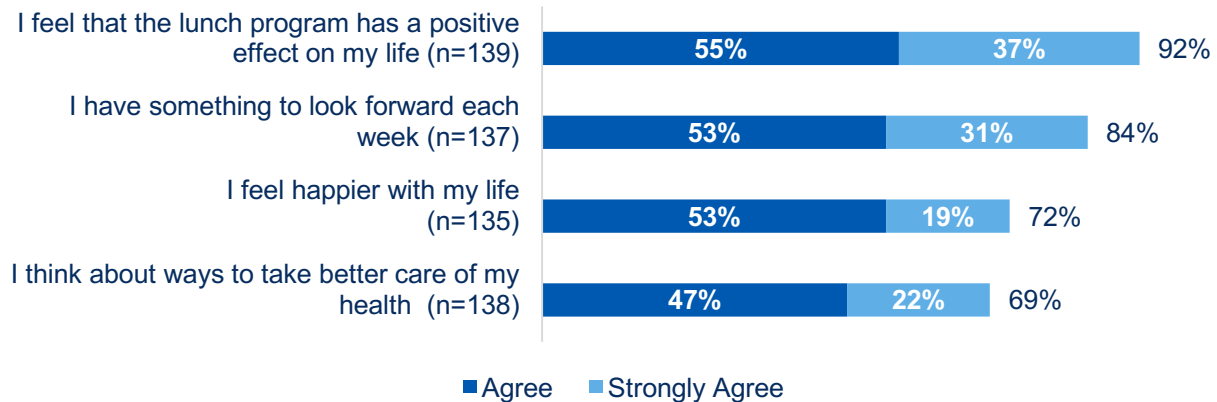
“I like to get together with friends. I look forward to going out on Thursdays.”

– Senior participant

Improved Quality of Life

Survey results suggest that NCSC plays a role in improving seniors’ quality of life and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Figure 8 indicates that since attending the program, seniors agreed or strongly agreed that the lunch program had a positive effect on their lives (92%), the program gave them something to look forward to each week (84%), they felt happier with their life (72%), and they thought about ways to take better care of their health (69%).

Figure 8. Quality of Life Ratings



Focus groups and observations support the survey results. Seniors spoke of having something to look forward to, improving their health practices, feeling a greater sense of calm, and improving their mental health. Volunteers noted that NCSC made seniors happy.

"I met [name] at lunch. I used to sit by myself and she came to talk to me. She's also a nurse and now she takes my blood pressure each week."

– Senior participant

"I was a recluse and very unhappy and lonely [before coming to this program.] Now I feel very alive, interested in people who are so pleasant. [I] have joined the Social Club."

– Senior participant

"I've attended the program since it started, it's a break from what I do and it's calming."

– Senior participant

"I've gotten friendlier as a result [of this program]."

– Senior participant

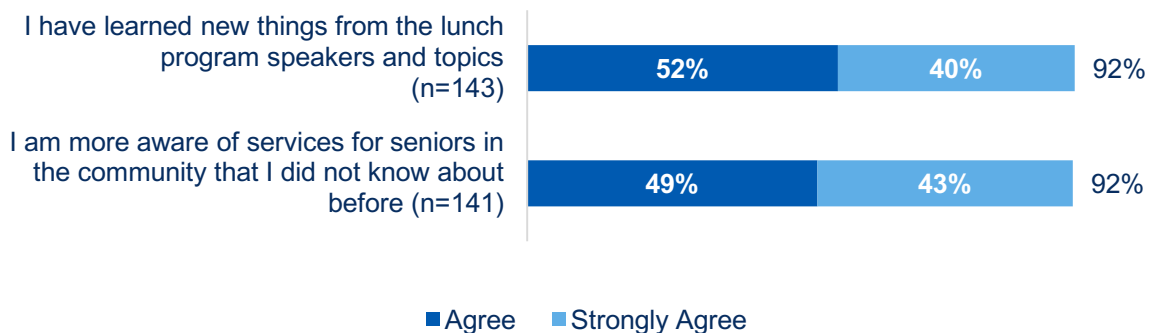
"[Volunteering has improved] my mental health. It keeps my endorphins flowing. I enjoy giving but receive so much from the program."

– Senior volunteer

Increased Awareness of Senior Services

As can be seen in Figure 9, seniors overwhelmingly indicated a greater awareness of services in the community since participating in NCSC. More than nine out of ten survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are more aware of services for seniors in the community (92%) and learned new information from the presentations (92%).

Figure 9. Awareness of Senior Services



Observations and findings from focus groups also verified seniors' increased awareness of services. Many seniors noted that while their primary motivations to attend NCSC were to socialize and eat lunch, they also learned a lot from the presentations and enjoyed them. They appreciated the wide range of topics presented to pique different interests of different seniors.



"I was really surprised by the programs. Since I've started coming, I've learned so much. At first I thought to myself, 'oh great, a program, and I rolled my eyes.' But I loved it."

– Senior participant

"The pharmaceutical person was very eye-opening [as to] how much of a price difference there is between retail stores and prescription costs."

– Senior participant

In addition to reporting an increased awareness of services in the community, some seniors said they subsequently participated in some of the services offered by the speakers (e.g., library, yoga, dance and exercise classes, ukelele group) and/or shared the information with others.

"I attended my first concert at the Vista Library after they came to lunch."

– Senior participant

"I share the information with people at the church who don't come to lunch."

– Senior participant

"I passed information to someone on gambling, the food bank, and the program to reduce your electric bill."

– Senior participant

IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

This section of the report focuses on the program’s implementation and subsequent recommendations for improving NCSC based on participant feedback and researcher observations about location, staffing, menu, ordering and meal delivery, presentations, and marketing.

Location

Strengths

More than nine out of ten survey respondents rated the location accessibility as “very good” (27%) or “excellent” (64%). Focus group participants frequently spoke of convenience and location as key to differentiating NCSC from other lunch programs.

“This program belongs to my community. It serves the needs of MY community and it makes me happy to see and help.”

– Senior volunteer

“This program is special because of convenience. I tried to go to the local senior center. I didn’t like it and it was too far to go.”

– Senior participant

Challenges

- **Site Closures:** Over the course of 17 months, NCSC has changed locations two times because of low attendance. Several staff and volunteers noted that one of the closed locations had many low-income seniors who would particularly benefit from NCSC.
- **Transportation to lunch site:** Some seniors noted that while the location is convenient, there are residents who have medical conditions that inhibit them from being able to travel to the site, either because it is too far to walk or because they no longer drive.

“Some seniors couldn’t get up here. I proposed that if you can’t come, we find you transportation.”

– Senior volunteer

Recommendations

- **Identify seniors with the greatest financial need:** Determine if there are reasons why lower-income seniors might not attend NCSC, and consider differentiated marketing opportunities to target this population.
- **Identify seniors who have challenges getting to lunch:** Consider alternative ways to assist seniors who may want to attend lunch but are unable because of distance, transportation, and/or medical conditions.
- **Support volunteer transportation efforts:** Consider working with senior participant leaders at each site to coordinate a volunteer transportation program for seniors who are unable to get to the lunch site on their own.

Staffing and Volunteers

Strengths

Seniors spoke very highly of the staff and volunteers and the majority of survey respondents (92%) rated the helpfulness of staff and volunteers as “very good” or “excellent.” Focus group participants spoke about the warmth and patience of both ICS and DfC staff, as well as their willingness to fill whatever role and hole necessary to ensure the program’s success.

“I have to give the employees accolades on the truck with the conditions they are working in. I just think they do a marvelous job.”

– Senior volunteer

“This group [Interfaith] is great; they are good dealing with seniors and their ups and downs. We are lucky to have them. They want to make seniors happy and enrich their lives.”

– Senior participant



The senior focus group participants also spoke highly about the volunteers.

“I’m impressed to see the same volunteers every week.”

– Senior participant

“Volunteers are very dedicated and committed.”

– Senior participant

Volunteers also revealed ways in which NCSC has positively enriched their lives.

“I retired and got sick, and volunteering helped me get to know a lot of people.”

– Senior volunteer

“I’m new. I just moved here [and volunteering] helped me meet new people.”

– Senior volunteer

“Volunteering brings me responsibility and discipline. I know that I have something to do every week and have a reason to wake up in the morning.”

– Senior volunteer

Challenges

- **Staff turnover:** There has been turnover within both ICS and DfC, as well as with partner organizations. The staffing transitions have negatively impacted recruiting, coordinating and training volunteers; obtaining necessary data from new senior participants; coordinating and confirming speakers; developing and executing marketing strategies; and accurate and reliable data entry, retrieval and reporting.
- **Unreliable volunteers:** There were some instances in which volunteers did not show up, which meant staff had to juggle multiple responsibilities and lunch service did not run as smoothly or efficiently. There was also volunteer turnover, which translates to staff having to recruit and train new volunteers.
- **Limited staff and volunteer training:** Staff conveyed they were often expected to play multiple, competing roles – some of which they were not trained to do. Volunteers also indicated they received little or no formal training.
- **Site differences in volunteers’ roles and responsibilities:** The number, skills, and responsibilities of the volunteers varied across sites, which created the impression that some sites were better coordinated than others.

- **Lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities:** The roles and responsibilities of staff, interns, and volunteers were not always clear. For example, social work interns sometimes had to help with checking guests in, greeting speakers, and delivering meals (actually staff and volunteer roles) instead of providing case management services (the only role they should have).

Recommendations

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Use program outcomes and operational needs to clarify roles of staff, volunteers, and social work interns.
- **Analyze current staffing model:** Using clarified roles, analyze skill sets and abilities of current staff, volunteers, and interns to identify gaps and develop plans to fill gaps.
- **Formalize volunteer and intern program and management:** Allocate more resources toward managing volunteers and interns in order to achieve higher satisfaction and longer-term commitment. This includes formalizing roles, recruitment, training, expectations, communication, coordination, and volunteer appreciation.
- **Increase communication:** Host bi-annual site-based meetings with ICS, DfC, senior volunteers and senior participant leaders to address concerns, communicate successes, clarify roles, etc.

Menu

Strengths

Overall, senior participants were satisfied with the food, and about two-thirds rated the quality (66%) and variety of food (63%) as “very good” or “excellent.” Many of the focus group participants highlighted the convenience and affordable price of the food.

“The food is wonderful, balanced, and nutritious.”

– Senior participant

“I like the food but I like the price even better, and I don’t have to cook it.”

– Senior participant

Challenges

Although focus group participants were generally pleased with the menu, they did express some concerns and suggestions. Below are the most frequently mentioned concerns.

- **Confusion about how food is prepared:** Volunteers noted that some seniors did not understand that food was freshly prepared on the truck and consequently may not have understood the nutritional value of the food.
- **Seniors unclear how to communicate dietary needs:** Though the menu was intentionally designed to accommodate dietary restrictions and allergies, some seniors did not know they could custom order their food.
- **Quality of soup:** Seniors from every site complained that the soup was sometimes watery and cold.

Recommendations

- **Rotate the menu:** Rotate menu seasonally or two times a year to avoid stagnant options.
- **Educate volunteers and seniors about custom ordering:** Train volunteers and communicate regularly with seniors that food can be custom ordered to account for allergies and special dietary needs.
- **Extend nutrition opportunities beyond lunch:** Continue presentations that educate seniors about how to prepare produce and healthy meals at home.
- **Specific food feedback and recommendations:**
 - Always provide enough water, coffee and lemonade.
 - Improve quality and temperature of the soup.
 - Consider non-dairy desserts on hot days because seniors are worried about getting sick from desserts sitting in sun.
 - Limit excessive oils, salt and any kinds of seeds that upset common senior medical conditions (e.g., diverticulitis, high blood pressure, etc.).
 - Give whole fruit such as a banana or apple as a dessert option.

Ordering and Meal Delivery

Strengths

Based on feedback from both volunteers and senior participants, the ordering and meal delivery process has been the area of greatest challenge since the inception of the program. However, seniors noted emphatically that significant improvements had been made.

“Everything seems to be a lot smoother since Maria (new cook) started.”
– ICS Program Coordinator

“One person told me they came back after staying away for a while because they had heard that service is faster and the soup is better now.”
– DfC Program Coordinator

Challenges

- **Long wait time for food:** There has often been a long wait between ordering and receiving food.
- **To-Go orders slow down food preparation:** For seniors sitting at the site, there was a perception that To-Go orders were sometimes prepared first.
- **Perception that food delivery was unfair:** Seniors were not aware that food was intentionally prepared by meal choice and not in the order it was received. There were also inconsistencies in the way volunteers turned in orders.

“Sometimes it seems like [the] cook picks up a couple of tickets to cook and leaves others at the bottom. Then new orders are put on top of the others at the bottom.”

– Senior participant

“The first day was a catastrophe, but it is so much better now. It took time to make it work.”

– Senior participant

Recommendations

- **Educate seniors:** Have DfC staff periodically present to seniors to introduce who they are, explain how the ordering system works, educate about the nutritional content of food, and solicit feedback on food.
- **Document and review order and delivery protocol with volunteers:** Document and train volunteers on all food truck order and delivery protocols.



Presentations

Strengths

More than seven out of ten (73%) survey respondents rated the quality of programs and speakers as “very good” (45%) or “excellent” (28%). Seniors conveyed that they appreciated the variety and quantity of presentations, noting that they learned a lot and have enjoyed them.

Not surprisingly, high-quality speakers who could entertain and engage with the seniors were those who received the most attention from seniors. For example, a speaker from the Alzheimer’s Association was very engaging, prompting seniors to ask questions and stay longer to talk directly with the speaker. Another speaker provided seniors with information on senior self-defense, and invited seniors to stand and practice yelling, punching, and releasing holds.

Challenges

- **Inconsistency of speakers:** Seniors expressed frustration with speakers who spoke too long or who were not engaging. They noted that speakers whose presentations went too long cut into their socialization time with their friends.
- **Speakers selling products:** Seniors pointed out that on several occasions speakers seemed more like an infomercial, trying to sell a product or service to them instead of providing useful and educational information.
- **Difficulty hearing presentation:** Seniors and volunteers noted that, at times, it was hard to hear the presentations because of microphone challenges and particularly because other senior lunch participants often talk over and during the speaker.

“Some speakers I could care less about, but I’m always quiet...because I’m learning about it. People talk at other tables while the speaker is talking and it really bothers me.”

– Senior participant

- **Speaker no-shows:** Over the last nine months, there have been 24 instances of speakers not showing up for their presentations. In several of these instances, a replacement speaker was substituted, but for many of the presentations, ICS staff had to provide impromptu presentations or talks.

Recommendations

- **Allocate staff time to coordinate presentations:** Adequate time is needed to identify engaging topics and quality speakers, communicate and coordinate with them, and confirm their attendance several times before the lunch to reduce no-shows.

- **Create a presentation guide:** Develop a one-page “best practices” document for speakers to ensure their presentations are streamlined, engaging for seniors, and the proper length of time. Speakers should be encouraged to interact with seniors in their presentations and provide them with takeaways where possible (e.g., handouts, promotional materials, etc.).
- **Purchase presentation-related materials:** Invest in quality audio-visual equipment and microphones that work.
- **Formally request participants to remain quiet during presentations:** Several seniors suggested using a bell to quiet senior conversations.
- **Solicit presentation ideas from NCSC participants:** The following are some suggestions from senior focus group participants:
 - Experiential, engaging programs that get seniors up and moving
 - Presentations by mobile home park residents who have expertise and knowledge in a particular area
 - Docents from San Diego’s museums and galleries
 - More entertainment such as musical performances
 - Youth performances
 - Programs in which topics are lighthearted
 - Scams/ID/Theft prevention presentations
 - Animal-related programs
 - Information on day trips for seniors
 - Presentations from local city officials to discuss what is new in the community (especially during election year)



Marketing

Seniors repeatedly shared how surprised they were that more people did not attend the program given the convenience, quality of food, great presentations, and socialization opportunities. Seniors provided some explanations for low attendance and provided many recommendations to increase awareness and attendance.

Barriers to Attending

- **Lack of awareness about the program:** The program was heavily promoted in the beginning, but to a lesser degree as time has passed. There were also site differences in how much the program was promoted.
- **Misconceptions about who the program targets:** Some seniors questioned their eligibility and participation, thinking the program was intended for very low-income seniors.
- **Poor memory:** Some seniors do not remember there is a lunch program every week.
- **Social anxiety:** Some seniors are nervous about going into situations where they do not know people.
- **Long wait times:** Seniors may have had a bad experience early on with long wait times and consequently stopped attending.

Recommendations

- **Allocate staff time to outreach:** Ensure adequate time and resources are available to market the program to existing residents and prospective attendees.
- **Send out frequent reminders:** Remind seniors who live on site about lunch every week through multiple channels (e.g. flyers in mailboxes, robocalls, newsletters, email lists, signage outside location, etc.).
- **Enlist resident help:** Coordinate with, and take advantage of, residents who are leaders in the community to help promote NCSC. For example, some have email lists and high influence in the community.
- **Enlist park management's help:** Coordinate with park staff to promote regular communication with residents about program (e.g., park magazine or newsletter, park television station, robocalls).
- **Enlist neighboring organizations' help:** Tap into and promote through other faith centers and mobile home parks. Encourage them to announce NCSC in their bulletins and calendars.

- **Co-promote programs where possible:** For example, at one site there is a fitness program on the same day as NCSC. This could be co-promoted as “Feeling Fit – Eating Well.”
- **Use presentations to market program:** Release the speaker schedule in advance to promote the program.
- **Redesign flyer:** Ideas from residents include:
 - **Park-specific flyer:** Create a flyer that is specific to each park and keep it up-to-date (i.e., don’t use old flyers with locations crossed out).
 - **Include menu:** Include the menu on the back of the flyer so seniors realize how many options are available.
 - **Note accommodations:** Explicitly note on the flyer that meals can be customized to accommodate special diets, health conditions, and food allergies.
 - **Try a coupon:** Given that the first lunch is free for newcomers, include a note, “*Give us a try - lunch is on us*” and include a “free lunch coupon” that seniors can use.
- **Assign volunteers to welcome newcomers:** Establish a few volunteers at each site whose key function is to welcome newcomers.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on findings from this evaluation, NCSC is clearly making a positive difference in the lives of seniors. Survey and focus group data suggests that NCSC is meeting its goals of improving nutrition, increasing socialization, improving quality of life, and increasing awareness of senior services for its senior participants. Yet there is still room for improvement in terms of:

- Identifying seniors who have the greatest economic need and want to attend lunch, but may not be able to access the program sites
- Clarifying roles of staff, volunteers, and interns
- Increasing dependability and consistency of food quality
- Ordering and serving food in an efficient way
- Ensuring consistent high-quality presentations
- Fixing program software glitches and reconciling discrepancies to ensure accurate and reliable program data
- Marketing to increase daily participation rates and number of seniors served
- Ensuring systems and staffing have capacity for increased attendance

This evaluation report marks the halfway point of the three-year pilot program. Therefore, it is important to take the aforementioned recommendations into consideration for the second half of NCSC. Furthermore, the following suggestions warrant discussion and consideration in order to translate the evaluation findings into action and, ultimately, enhance the quality, usefulness, and sustainability of NCSC.

Improving Ongoing Evaluation Process

- Reconcile data discrepancies between ICS' former ServicePoint reporting system and new CiviCRM reporting system.
- Identify and capture missing demographic data from all lunch participants (see Appendix D for the registration form).
- Analyze participant data by frequency of attendance.
- Improve ICS accuracy for monthly and quarterly reporting.
- Consider extending evaluation to include senior participants who no longer attend NCSC.
- Identify conferences and other forums to present NCSC program and evaluation findings for greater exposure and funding.
- Determine other evaluation activities and schedule for the next 17 months.

Communicate the Findings

- RSFF and individual agencies review evaluation report and identify key areas for discussion with larger team.
- Evaluation Team and RSFF meet with key staff members from each agency regarding findings and perspective on program impact.
- Utilize the next quarterly team meeting to discuss evaluation report and develop collective next steps.
- Develop infographic with high-level findings for public relations, marketing, fundraising and development.
- Present evaluation findings to senior participants as part of lunch presentation.

APPENDIX A: Menu

Thyme Together Menu

NAME _____

ORDER # _____

CHOOSE 1 ENTREE:

_____ GRILLED CHICKEN SALAD

_____ GRILLED or COLD SANDWICH
TURKEY OR HAM
WHEAT OR WHITE BREAD
CHED, PROV, AMER
LETTUCE, TOMATO, MAYO, AVO

_____ 1/2 SANDWICH & SOUP

_____ TURKEY BURGER

_____ CHICKEN STREET TACOS

_____ PHILLY CHICKEN SANDWICH

_____ DAILY SPECIAL

CHOOSE 1 SIDE:

SIDE GARDEN SALAD
STEAMED VEGGIES
CUP OF SOUP OF DAY
BAGGED BAKED CHIPS

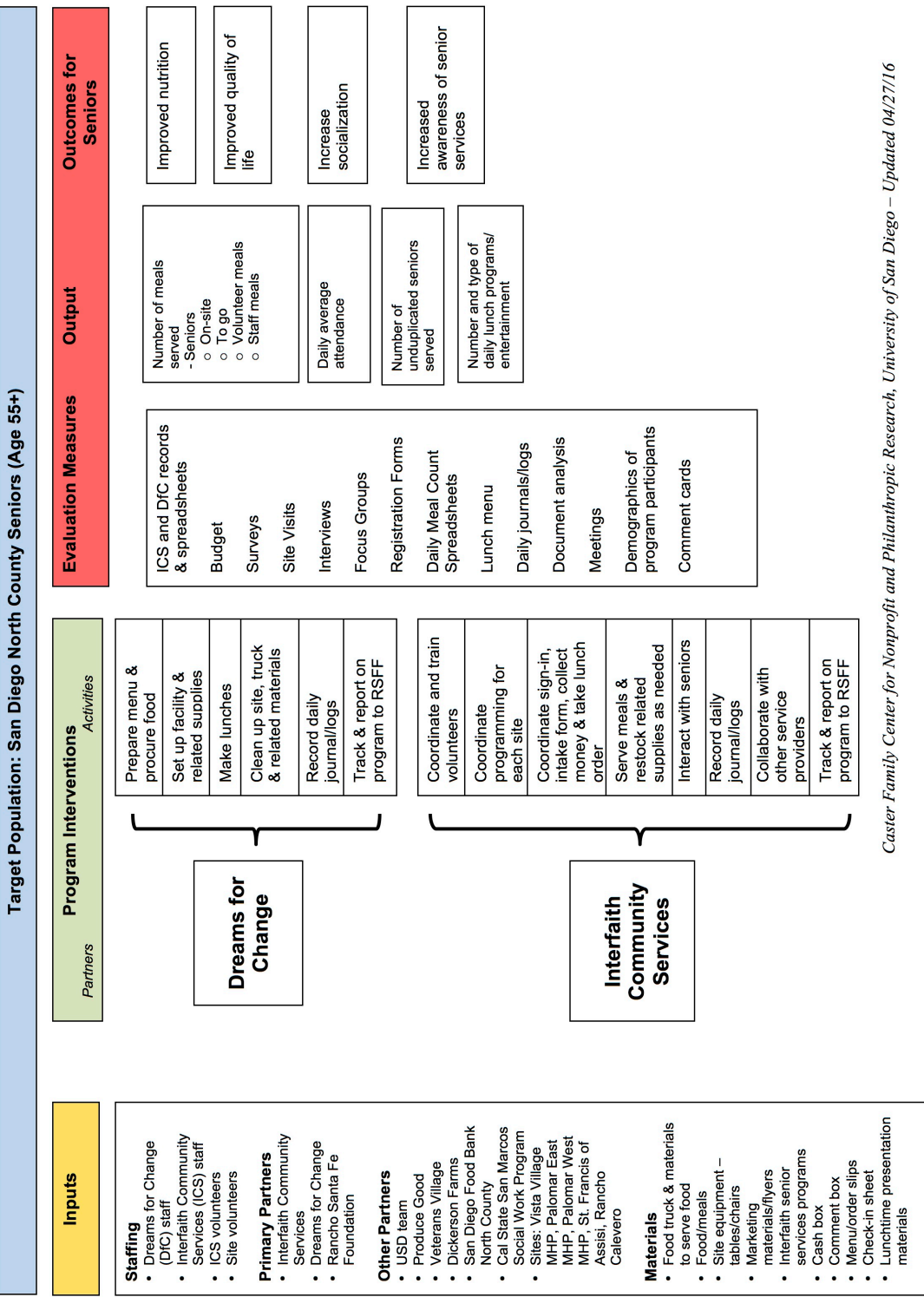
CHOOSE 1 DESSERT:

CUP OF FRESH FRUIT
DESSERT OF THE DAY

Self Service: coffee, tea, & water.

APPENDIX B: Logic Model A

Logic Model for North County Senior Connections Thyme Together Food Truck Lunch Program



Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research, University of San Diego – Updated 04/27/16

APPENDIX C: Senior Survey



North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Lunch Program Evaluation

Researchers from the University of San Diego are helping the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation evaluate the North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* food truck program, intended to provide “food, friendship, and health” to seniors in North County San Diego.

Your feedback is important to help us improve the program. You will not be asked to provide your name or any identifying information and your responses will be combined with other responses and reported in aggregate.

Please check box to indicate that you have read and understand why you are being asked to complete this survey.

Today’s Date: _____

Home Zip Code: _____

Year of Birth: _____

Gender: Male Female

Do you live alone? Yes No

Program site: Vista Village (M) Palomar East (T) St. Francis (W-lunch)
 Palomar West (TH) Rancho Calevero (F)

How often do you attend the Thyme Together lunch program?

Every week 2-3 times a month Once a month Less than once a month This is my first time

When did you first start coming to the Thyme Together lunch program?

January-March, 2015 October-December, 2015
 April-June, 2015 January-March, 2016
 July-September, 2015 Can’t remember

Please rate the quality of the following services by using the scale below and check the box that applies.

Services	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Very good	5 Excellent
Quality of food					
Variety of food					
Helpfulness of staff and volunteers					
Quality of programs and speakers					
Accessibility of lunch location					

Please turn over to complete back page



Please think about your life since you started attending in the Thyme Together senior lunch program. Check the box that matches your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

Since I started attending the Thyme Together senior lunch program...	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
I see friends more often					
I have made new friends					
I think about ways to take better care of my health					
I eat meals that are more nutritious for me					
I feel happier with my life					
I have had more opportunities for socialization					
I have something to look forward to each week					
I have become aware of services available for seniors in the community that I did not know about before					
I feel that the lunch program has a positive effect on my life					
I have learned new things from the lunch program speakers and topics					
I would recommend the lunch program to a friend or family member					
I feel more connected to my community					
Overall I am satisfied with the program					

Please write any additional comments you have about the Thyme Together lunch program?

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey!

APPENDIX D: Registration Form

Registration Form Senior Connections and Project C.A.R.E.



Name _____ **Date of Birth** _____

Address _____ **Apt/Sp#** _____

City _____ **Zip Code** _____

Home Phone No. _____ **E-Mail** _____

Gender M F **Do you live alone?** Yes No

Information about other members of your household. If you live alone, skip this section.

Name	Relationship	Gender	Date of Birth

Today's Date: _____

Senior Connections Lunch: Please check location. Vista Village (M) Palomar East (T)
 El Dorado (W-brunch) St. Francis (W-lunch) Palomar West (TH) Rancho Calevero (F)

Project C.A.R.E.: Outreach Event Senior Center Walk-In Phoned In

Race American Indian/Alaskan Native Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island Hispanic/Latino
 Asian White Non-Hispanic
 Black/African American Other _____ Prefer not to answer
 Prefer not to answer

What services are you interested in? Please check all that apply

Project C.A.R.E.	Other Senior Services:
<input type="checkbox"/> Vial of Life	<input type="checkbox"/> Minor Home Repair
<input type="checkbox"/> How R U Calls	<input type="checkbox"/> Cal-Fresh
<input type="checkbox"/> Friendly Visitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Angels Depot
<input type="checkbox"/> Information & Referrals	

Annual Income (Please check one) Prefer not to answer

Household Size: 1 Person	Household Size: 2 Persons
<input type="checkbox"/> \$0 - \$17,300 (\$0 - \$1,442 monthly)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$0 - \$19,800 (\$0 - \$1,650 monthly)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$17,301 - \$28,85 (\$1,443 - \$2,404 monthly)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$19,801 - \$33,300 (\$1,651 - \$2,775 monthly)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$28,851 - \$46,150 (\$2,405 - \$3,845 monthly)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$33,301 - \$52,750 (\$2,776 - \$4,396 monthly)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$46,151 + above (\$3,846 + above monthly)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$52,750+ above (\$4,397 + above monthly)

Office Use Only:

Service Point # _____ Date Entered _____ By: _____

Follow-up Call _____ Date _____ Keep Active: Yes No

Reason for Exit: Deceased Nursing Home Moved out of service area Other _____



North County Senior Connections Thyme Together - Food Truck Lunch Program

Thank you for providing this information – it will help make this program a success!

How did you hear about this program?

- Flyer from mobile home park/church
- Signage in mobile home park/church
- Friend/Neighbor
- Family member
- Other – Please specify: _____

How did you get here today?

- Walked
- Drove self
- Driven by neighbor
- Driven by family member
- Other – Please specify: _____

Did you come alone or with someone?

- Alone
- With someone. If so, please specify with whom:
 - Friend/neighbor who lives here
 - Friend who does not live here
 - Family member
 - Other – Please specify: _____

If you were not having lunch here, what would you normally do at this time?

- Be at home, but do not normally eat lunch
- Be at home, and prepare lunch
- Go out to lunch
- Other – Please specify: _____

Are you a caregiver? For example, do you take care of your spouse or neighbor?

- No, I am not a caregiver
- Yes, I care for my:
 - Spouse
 - Neighbor
 - Other, please specify:

What do you hope to get from this program?

Caster Center, University of San Diego_10.23.15



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