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Northeast Philadelphia Wellness and Client Engagement Research Turning Points for Children: The Food and Wellness Network

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE

Through Bridging the Gaps, we were able to spend 7 weeks at the Food and Wellness Network, an affiliate of Turning Points for Children. The Food and Wellness Network, located in Frankford, primarily acts as a community based food pantry that offers free food, infant formula, and diapers to individuals and families. However, the Food and Wellness Network also provides all sorts of resources for organizations that provide social services and outreach programs that are desirable in an underserved Northeast Philadelphia community. The only eligibility requirements are that you must be 16 years or older and live in the 15th Police District in order to receive free food, but formula and diapers are eligible to anyone living anywhere in Philadelphia. Shoppers at the pantry have the opportunity to browse the aisles and pick up free food once every 2 weeks, a service that the customers greatly appreciate.



OUR GOALS AS INTERNS

Our objectives as interns at The Food and Wellness Network involved implementing a health education program for the customers of the food pantry based on their interests. The goal was to learn more about the communities desires to learn more about...

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Emotional and Social Well-Being
- Nutrition Education on the Pantry's Products

GAUGING THE INTERESTS OF FRANKFORD

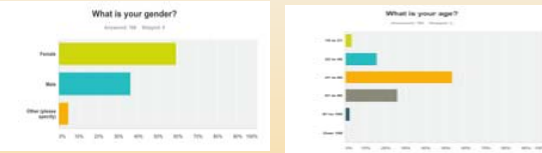
In order to better understand what the interests were of the community that we were working in, a survey was provided to customers of the pantry to fill out. If someone participated they were awarded an extra item from the pantry. The survey offered was anonymous but provided identifying information on gender, age, household members, amount spent on food weekly, as well as one's interests in...

- Physical Health – Exercises, Nutrition, Oral Hygiene, Health Insurance Coverage, Disability Benefits, etc.
- Mental Health – Depression and Anxiety, Kids with Mental Disabilities, Stress Management, etc.
- Emotional and Social Well-Being – Relationships, Job Training, Addiction (Drugs, Alcohol), Domestic Violence, etc.
- Household Affairs – Family Case Management, Childcare, Financial Management, Public Benefit Enrollment and Food Stamps, WIC, etc.
- Information on Pantry Items – Healthy Recipes, Nutrition Label Education, Packaging Vocab, Affordable Wholesale Produce, etc.



THE RESULTS

The interest survey yielded an abundance of eye-opening information about both the customers of the pantry, but also of the larger community we were serving. Over a 2 week period, we were able to receive survey responses from 188 people that visited the pantry. 59% of those survey responders were females, while 36% were males, with the last 5% being made of people that identified differently. Also, the most significant age group that the survey revealed to be visiting the pantry were people aged 41 to 60 years old. The responses we received indicated that about half of the people visiting the pantry are the only adults in their household. The surveys also revealed that these adults were often parents living in a single parent household.



We also received valuable data regarding the interests of the members of the pantry. When it came to interests in aspects of physical health, 56% of survey responders (158) showed an interest in learning about exercises and workouts, while about 53% of responders were interested in learning more about nutrition and healthy eating. The mental health section of the survey revealed that 72% of survey responders (111) were looking for resources for help with depression and anxiety. Of the 103 responders to the emotional and social well-being section of the survey, 56% were interested in help with relationships, while about 50% were interested in job training. Also, of the 103 responders to the Household Affairs section, 59% were interested in financial management education. There was a lot of variance among how much was spent on food per week, but typically it was around 41 to 60 dollars per week. Many customers of the pantry also showed interest in learning about how to make healthy foods with the items provided at the pantry, as well as where to access affordable wholesale fruits and vegetables.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

After receiving feedback from the interest survey, we created educational programs for the pantry's customers. The first two weeks after receiving the results, we focused on Physical Health and Nutrition. These educational programs included teaching how to read nutrition labels, educating about food packaging buzzwords like *gluten*, *organic*, and *GMO's*. Food demonstrations were also provided to expose customers to foods that may not be well known, but are provided in the pantry, such as quinoa and matzah. The following two weeks were dedicated to Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being. During this time, educational programs included demonstrations of Free Apps that are downloadable on a smartphone (for example apps that aid in meditation), ways to manage stress, and resources and information on where to go to manage conditions like Anxiety, Depression, Addiction, as well as many others.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

"Spending seven weeks at FAWN has been an immensely valuable and eye-opening experience. Growing up an hour north of Philadelphia, has kept me sheltered from so many aspects of both the city of Philadelphia and urban living in general. Getting the exposure that I have this summer to Frankford and Philadelphia and meeting the people that we have at the pantry is something that I will never forget. I learned more about Philly in my seven weeks at Frankford than I had in my 23 years of living in the suburbs. I definitely plan on using what I have learned about underserved communities as I go through my career and on to practice medicine."

- Matthew Beck

"In all honesty, I was really nervous about my first week at the Food and Wellness Network. I was already pretty intimidated by the fact that I am the only School Psychology major in the Bridging the Gaps program. Even though I was nervous, my experience at FAWN went better than I anticipated. I feel as though, we quickly assimilated ourselves into the environment. The volunteers and community are truly amazing, and people are very grateful for FAWN. We conducted an interest survey to see what people in the community were interested in learning about, and we found that many people were interested in learning about nutrition education, healthy eating, and mental health. This community may not have the opportunity to learning about these important topics, and I'm glad we're shedding a light on some critical issues."

- Melissa Acosta

