

Food Pantries Distribute More Fresh Produce in West Piedmont Health District, VA

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Summary

Household food insecurity is defined as having limited or uncertain access to food. Residents in the West Piedmont Health District of Virginia have higher rates of food insecurity than the state average of 11.8%. In the city of Martinsville and in Henry, Patrick, and Franklin Counties, 22.6%, 14.9%, 12.8% and 10.9% of the population are food insecure, respectively. In 2015, Go Healthy West Piedmont (GHWP) provided refrigerators to five food pantries and a soup kitchen for storage and display of fresh produce. GHWP also works to promote local Giving Gardens by providing essential supplies and support to the gardens, healthy lifestyle information, and nutrition education to the food pantries in order to increase healthier food access in the community.

Challenge

Feeding America estimates that an average meal in Virginia costs \$3.01. Despite this modest price, an additional \$523,149,000 is needed to meet Virginia's food requirements, which means that Virginians are missing 173,803,654 meals. US adults living in food-insecure households consume fewer weekly servings of fruits, vegetables, and dairy and lower levels of micronutrients, including magnesium, iron, zinc, and calcium. Not eating enough nutritious foods has been associated with having chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity. In the West Piedmont Health District, food pantries and soup kitchens can help close the gap for residents who are food insecure, but they sometimes are unable to distribute fresh produce before it spoils.

Solution

The GHWP initiative works with the West Piedmont Health District to promote wellness and decrease chronic disease. GHWP partnered the food pantries and soup kitchen to promote the distribution of nutritious foods and produce to clients. The initiative worked with the local Giving Gardens (a program that grows and donates fresh produce to the food pantries) to help them provide increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables for community members. GHWP provided healthy nutrition education to clients along with encouragement to promote healthier food consumption through Go, Slow, Whoa labeling. In addition, GHWP funded 49-cubic-foot refrigerators with glass doors to the food pantries and soup kitchen to showcase and store the produce.



Your Involvement is Key

For more information about GHWP, visit:

<http://www.gohealthywestpiedmont.org/>.

You can learn more about the Giving

Gardens program by visiting: [https://www.](https://www.facebook.com/fc.givinggardens)

[facebook.com/fc.givinggardens](https://www.facebook.com/fc.givinggardens). This project

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Results

During 2016, the partnership between GHWP, Giving Gardens, and the food pantries and soup kitchen has provided increased access to nutritious foods, such as fresh produce, for hundreds of food insecure residents in the health district. The partnership between these entities has worked to set up a system to provide fresh produce to local food pantries and soup kitchens so their clients have greater access to fruits and vegetables. The new refrigeration units mean that clients have increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables because they do not spoil so quickly. Some of the food pantries also have decreased their waste of fresh produce by up to 50%. Others reported they can now use 85% to 90% of the produce that comes in and distribute it by the end of the week.

Contact

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"With the refrigerators, we can hold fresh produce a week at a time. We were previously throwing away 50% of the fresh produce; now we are throwing away only 10-15%."

- Judy Lafon God's Provision Food Bank

Sustainable Success

To ensure continued growth of the initiative, Giving Gardens has partnered with the United Way of Franklin County, Rocky Mount Rotary Club, Carilion Clinic, and other local businesses for funding. The emphasis on fresh produce and healthy eating has inspired many of these community partners to start wellness initiatives in their own organizations. For example, Lake Christian Ministries added a weekly nutrition education component to its food distribution. Members of Patrick Springs Pentecostal Holiness Church formed a group called Bod-4-God to discuss better nutrition and health behaviors. Similar initiatives started by local organizations, businesses, and community members can help to sustain West Piedmont's healthy community initiatives.