



# Successes and Challenges of Using a Peer Mentor Model for Nutrition Education within a Food Pantry: A Qualitative Study



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## Introduction

- Food insecurity remains a significant public health problem in the United States, affecting an estimated 37 million individuals. (1)
- Over 84% of individuals using Emergency Food Pantries (EFP) are food insecure.
- Communities relying on supplemental food experience increased rates of obesity, metabolic syndrome, hypertension and diabetes and often consume diets of poor quality (1, 8-12).
- Delivering nutrition education within an emergency food pantry (EFP) is a valuable and sustainable approach to target food insecure and underserved populations.
- Peer mentors have been used successfully for health education and promotion.
- Little known about using a peer mentor model as a modality for nutrition education delivery within this setting.

## Purpose

- Identify the successes and challenges of using a peer mentor model within an EFP.
- Identify best approaches for delivering nutrition education in an EFP community.

## Qualitative Measures

- Two semi-structured, 60-minute focus groups at end of program

## Methods

- 11 peer mentors recruited from Martha's Choice Marketplace, Catholic Social Services' largest EFP, located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.
- > 40 years of age, high school graduates and received some supplemental assistance
- Training: 9 hands-on sessions on basic cooking skills and healthy eating principles followed by 3 peer-mentor led community workshops
- Semi-structured interviews conducted with peer mentors following training program/workshops
- Qualitative content analysis to determine key concepts, categories and themes
- Ethics approval obtained from Villanova University Institutional Review Board

## Results

**Success 1:**  
Empowering Peer Mentor Experience

- Sense of purpose
- Prepared
- Supported

**Success 2:**  
Appropriately Tailored Nutrition Education

- Learned new information
- Valued ideas
- Motivated to share

**Success 3:**  
Use of Accessible Ingredients and Simple Preparation

- Increase in cooking self-efficacy
- Desire to experiment

**Challenge:**  
Attracting Community Members

- Transportation barriers
- Food pick up is greater priority
- Terminology used

I think the peer mentor model boosted confidence level a bit when you're going to demonstrate and when you're meeting people. It helped you communicate

It helped me as a whole think twice before eating things that are full of salt or margarine or you can eat good without frying everything

I was getting a little bit turned off by meat, so this all has taught me to experiment.

I am being creative. I am making my own dressings

I think barriers are, it's a food bank night. That's why...they're bussing it, cabbing it, Uber-ing it, whatever.

I think it worked because it gave you more of a backbone to stand on. This way you had enough information under your belt that you felt confident....

I would say I liked how we demonstrate to people

This program...kind of brought back some things that I knew and helped me share with others. Like taking something and making it healthier and then having someone say, hey, this is pretty good.

I use less salt and ore different seasonings

It was like instead of a, b, and c, okay I can add this to it, or I can add that to it....

They have the food with them. They don't want to miss out on the food because they need it

Do away with the word "workshop"...people think they are being lectured or something

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- EFPs provide a non-traditional setting for nutrition education
- Using trained peer mentors to deliver nutrition education in EFP has benefits
- Further research needed on health impact

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