OVERVIEW

With few grocery stores, distant and expensive farmers markets, and limited public transportation in Kent County, Rhode Island, the rate of food insecurity is high. This project sought to address this issue, as well as resulting chronic disease and obesity in West Warwick by improving access to environments of healthy food and beverage options. Through various methods, healthy food was made more accessible to children, families, and seniors.

OBJECTIVES

Increase Farmers Markets

By establishing pop-up WIC farmers markets that accept WIC checks, SNAP, and senior vouchers, healthier food and beverage choices were available to West Warwick and Warwick residents. The Bonus Bucks program incentivized using benefits – for every $5 spent, an additional $2 in tokens was available.

Community partners provided information on resources and programs they offer. Chauffeurs were available to give families a tour of the market, introduce them to farmers, and explain how to use supplemental nutrition benefits. Fun activities for kids and families made the market more approachable and reduced anxiety for first time visitors. Because of the success of the 2 markets in 2016, and community interest, 4 events are planned for 2017.

Create Food Resource Guide

A food resource guide detailing Warwick and West Warwick food assistance locations was created and distributed. The guide lists food pantries and meal sites by day of week and shows their location on a map.

The guide is available at agencies, partner organizations, and churches throughout the Warwick and West Warwick area. Due to the changing nature of food assistance locations and times, it is formatted as a live document ready to be updated and reprinted when necessary.
Provide Summer Meals to Youth

The summer meals program sought to address food insecurity spikes during summer when children don’t receive school-provided free/ reduced breakfast, lunch, or snacks.

By expanding from one site (Echo Valley Apartments) to include the West Warwick Library in 2016, the number of meals served grew from 8 meals to 34 meals per day. This partnership with the library also fostered a love of reading in children by engaging them before and after meals. In 2016, 160 children received meals through this program.

Increase Community and Clinical Linkages (WIC 101)

The WIC 101 training provided basic information about the program and addressed common misconceptions health care professionals may have regarding WIC. Awareness about the program prompted discussions with patients about nutrition assistance options and increased referrals to WIC by health care professionals. A drop down option in the menu at Thundermist Health Center allowed for easier coordination of care and referrals to the program.

Tabling events and community outreach occurred in grocery stores, pharmacies, and health care facilities. Flyers promoting WIC and healthy nutrition were posted in frequently visited locations like the YMCA, public libraries, laundry mats, and corner stores.

Integrate Food Delivery System

Coordinating services with Elder Services and the Westbay Marketplace, emergency food packages and monthly commodities are available for delivery to clients by caseworkers. By establishing communication between the two departments and developing a system of steps to request, receive, and document food packages, more elders and protectives are able to receive nutrition assistance.

OUTCOMES

- Farmers markets served 598 people and sold $3,124 worth of food.
- Of the $831 Bonus Bucks issued to WIC or SNAP recipients, $514 were redeemed.
- Increased farmers markets from 2 dates in 2016 to 4 planned for 2017.
- Almost tripled number of free summer meals served in 2015 to 2016.

Though there is still progress to be made, we’re grateful for the hard work and dedication of our community partners in providing better access to healthy food and beverage options to Warwick and West Warwick residents.

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