

Spending Trends with Pacific Community Resource Society: Final Project Report

Executive Summary

Pacific Community Resource Society (PCRS) provides a wide range of social, health, education, employment, and life skills services to vulnerable people in the greater Vancouver area. The project's focus was to analyze the spending trends of PCRS, within the April to July time period. With this in mind, we proposed our research question: "How much money is PCRS spending on food and what are the major trends?" Through acquiring these trends and viewing them to be congruent with their values and service principles, PCRS may continue or revise their current food expenditure. Some values and principles PCRS follow include: economic security, community, inclusion, advocacy, cultural enrichment, and empowerment. The PCRS runs a large number of programs, but for the case of this project we focused on analyzing the spending trends of four: the Eagle High Program, Breakfast Club, Kwayatsut and the Broadway Youth Resource Center. Furthermore, by helping PCRS with visualizing their spending trends, the local community also benefits, as the final results may allow the PCRS to make some changes in order to provide a more sustainable and nutritional meal program. Moreover, PCRS has the desire to support a food provider that benefits the community and that matches their values, so as a result, places where they purchase foods may also change according to our findings and recommendations. Our methods to obtain the desired information included us entering the information provided on the receipts obtained and calculating the total amount spent per month for each program as well as the amount spent per month on each food group (fruits & vegetables, grains, dairy, meat, others) for each program. Key limitations included a lack of time and incomplete data.

Introduction

As a large non-profit society, the Pacific Community Resource Society (PCRS) supports and serves many communities throughout the Lower Mainland. Meals are provided by the PCRS at their many centers, such as the Broadway Youth Resource Centre, which includes programs like the Eagle High Program. The aim for our group required analyzing the spending trends of the PCRS and suggesting recommendations based on our findings. Through discovering the trends in their financial reports, the PCRS hopes to better budget their food expenditures, while purchasing foods from suppliers who match their organization's values and principles. Another objective requires the analysis of their financial records within the April to July timeframe in order to present recommendations for the upcoming year. Through these objectives, we hope to learn techniques of spotting trends and methods of analyzing data.

A limitations that occurred throughout this project was the lack of complete information provided. For some programs, information was limited as either a month of spendings were not received, or not all spendings were provided for a certain month. Unfortunately, this lack of information was not caught until the final stages of our project and a lack of time hindered us from seeking the missing information. However, there was enough data to present several trends and allow the BYRC to visualize their food spendings.

Methods

We will be collecting data from the BYRC financial records, specifically receipts from April to July 2015. A tour will also be conducted to gain extra information on how the meal programs and facilities work. Data analyzed from receipts and interviews will be put onto Microsoft Excel and used to identify the BYRC's spending trends and compiled into a report. Once the trend is captured, it can further be analysed according to the amount of money spent on a specific food group.

Ethical Considerations

The financial records that we receive will be kept confidential and will only be shared within the context of the class. Before interviews, appropriate questions will be prepared and permission to quote interviewees will be obtained (interviews were not conducted as we determined that it would not be necessary in the scope of our project).

Results

We analyzed the food receipts of four programs that the Pacific Community Resource Society offers at the new Broadway Youth Resource Centre. All of which offer a meal plan or offer food to those in need. These programs are Breakfast Club, Eagle High, Kwayatsut, and the Broadway Youth Resource Centre. In order to determine any glaring trends, we entered all the information that was on the receipts we were given on a spreadsheet. As discussed earlier, some of these pieces of information were ambiguous and sometimes lacked sufficient and consistent information. As a result there are some programs that are missing a total expenditure amount for a month or two due to that fact that the information was not provided. Although this information is missing, we were still able to identify the general trends and the average amount spent on each food group.

Table 1. Overall dollars spent per month, per program.

Program	Amount Spent per Month				Total Amount Spent
	April	May	June	July	
Kwayatsut		\$147.07	\$1586.39	\$656.76	\$2390.22
Eagle High	\$1510.02	\$1525.98	\$2259.28		\$5295.28
BYRC	\$2481	\$2613	\$1956.51	\$1246.15	\$8296.66
Breakfast Club		\$51.72	\$44.07	\$122.02	\$217.81

Table 2. Number of items purchased at each supermarket.

Supermarket	Number of items Purchased
Save on food	1
Shapla Grocery	1
Granville Island Market	2
Market Place	4
Kim's Mart	5
Safeway	47
No Frills	54
Best Value Market	70
Buy-low Foods	94
Sysco	173
Superstore	672
Total	1157

For all four programs, it was discovered that the majority of spendings proceeded towards Fruits and Vegetables with Meat and Alternatives second. This came as no surprise as some of these programs provide hot meals, and require proper ingredients in order to prepare them. A minimal amount of junk food was purchased, with the most purchased by Eagle High. We also discovered that each program purchased their items from different supermarkets which appear to be located near the BYRC.

Discussion

Youths with low-income and low food-security, face increased risks of poorer physical, mental, and social health (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009). In order to combat this, community organizations such as the PCRS have been created to not only provide food for at-risk youths in need, but to also provide education and mentorship; building community food security. As a result of increasing education towards food security, youths and those around them become more aware of the issue and creates an open dialogue, encouraging those who need assistance to seek it (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009).

The aim for our project required analyzing the spending trends within the four programs ran by the PCRS, and suggesting recommendations based on our findings. With this information, different suggestions can be made to further improve PCRS's programs. As a large organization, the PCRS can contribute greatly to the community food system through educating youths and purchasing from the local community. There are also options of setting up a community garden which may, in the long run, cut costs on purchasing vegetables. Our data is important as it represents a stepping stone in what will hopefully become a larger project. By analyzing a small portion of their spendings evidence of spending habits are displayed allowing the PCRS to choose from companies more congruent with their values. It also allows a glimpse into the larger picture of the organization, as the spending trends of each program is shown. With this information, bulk ordering groceries from companies can be accomplished, reducing costs.

As mentioned above, a there were a few limitations in our methods. Aside from missing some information within each program, as a group, none of the members have a background in finance, or business. This limited our ability to further analyze the records as it took us a while to figure out the proper logistical way of analyzing the large amount of data. In order to improve our design, we believe that we should start analyzing the trends earlier in order to allow time to

seek help from others more experienced in this field. Better organizational skills while using excel would also assist in better time management during this project.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our project has shown that the majority of the PCRS's spendings are geared towards Meat & Alternatives as well as Fruits & Vegetables. These are positive results as the purchased products can positively benefit those who are lacking in nutrition and food. Different programs also appear to favour different grocery stores, for example, the use of No Frills and Save on Foods. As this project is the first of its kind for our community partner, it provides a base for future projects to build off of, allowing future contributors to further analyze and suggest trends for the PCRS. Unfortunately, this project is also limited as it only allowed us a glimpse into the financial aspect of the PCRS. Little to no information was provided on how the purchased foods are served, or how they are prepared. Also, spendings within these four months may not be similar with those in later months.

As an organization that constantly provides food for youths in need, purchasing food from local farmers may help enhance food security within the community. By purchasing from local farms, the PCRS contributes towards money circulating within the community, boosting food security. We also suggest purchasing in bulk for each program as it may also cut on spending costs.

Critical Reflections

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Analyzing the spending trends at the Broadway Youth Resource Center provided a challenge and allowed a glimpse of the logistical side of running an organization. Though it was difficult at times, as I had to learn how to use excel and discover different methods of organizing the large amounts of data, it was satisfying to see the completed final results of the project. Throughout this project, I continually learned the importance of organization and proper ways to communicate with my community partner and group members. The flexible learning days also allowed us to visit the BYRC, which was an eye opening experience as it provided insight on a problem – food-insecurity in youths – that I have not experienced. I believe that with these days an ample enough time was allocated to work with our community partners, and the days were also helpful in allowing our group to plan our next step. The flexible learning experiences also allowed me to do further research on the topic, which provided me insight into how organizations and researchers approach the issue of food-insecurity. Organizing everything online also allowed for easy access to information and was a simple method of communicating lectures and provided a space for me to analyze my progress, through the group blog posts, throughout the semester. Overall, I believe that this project was a challenge which allowed me to grow my organizational, communication, and analytical skills, and discover the tasks behind a community organization.

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This CBEL project was an exciting challenge, analyzing financial reports was not something I have previously done. The biggest benefit for myself was learning how to use Excel, which I believe could be a useful skill to have. Also, I found that communicating with the community partner and fellow group members was key to having a successful project, especially

with gauging expectations for the outcome of the project. The Flexible Learning slots allotted were helpful, allowing us to meet with our community partner and even visit the BYRC facilities. It was also a time that allowed our group to work on the project and organize our findings. Also, having the tutorials helped give guidance with the progress of our project, and allowed us to see different perspectives through talking to Carrie, Will and Eduardo. Visiting the facilities gave me insight that the people that the BYRC are serving are people just like ourselves; mostly high school students, which was a time of my life just a few years ago. Hopefully, our project can be a base for future projects to allow a bigger, positive impact within the BYRC community. The most challenging portion for me was doing presentations. Public speaking has always been a weakness for myself, however, doing presentations is an effective way of improving in this aspect.

“Y”

The project, spending trends at Pacific Community Resource Society, was a challenge for me. Because I haven't done anything relevant to analyze financial statements before. The first thing I learned from this project is how to use Excel to analyze numbers and make graphs. From the project, I found that communication is important in completing group projects. That's why the flexible learning days were really helpful. In the first flexible learning day, we visited the BYRC which gives us an overview of the community center and allow us to meet with community partner to learn their demand of this project. Other flexible learning time allowed us to finish group work and do more research on the project. I also learned a lot from the lecture, such as the process of changing a food system which give me a guide of doing this project. Let me know our project (identify the quality of food) is the first of changing a food system. I hope our project can help future projects to make more positive impact within the community. Personally, I

thought this project is also helpful with my daily life. Now, I always have a plan in mind before shopping.

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“Spending Trends at Pacific Community Resources Society” was a CBEL project that I personally thought was challenging and interesting at the same time. The project was challenging because it requires financial analysis skill, which I have never learnt before. However, as I went further and also with help from instructors and other group members, I changed my mind and began to think that this project was actually important and interesting. Through this project, I have become more familiar with Excel as well as how to organize and analyze financial data that I believe would be an asset for my future life. Most importantly, the flexible learning days gave me the opportunities to visit BYRC on site. In addition to meet some BYRC staffs and members, I also saw facilities and services that they provide and together they gave me new insights of how a community organization works, such as the system of how they help vulnerable people. Moreover, by doing further research regarding food insecurity, I now have a clearer idea of how food insecurity was handled by professionals. I could also make a comparison between what’s written online and food insecurity issue looks like in real life. The online platforms, including group blogs and e-lectures saved my time and taught me about the importance of communication between group members. Overall, this CBEL project was a very valuable experience and I hope that this project would continue as it may improve the wellbeing of the whole communities, not just BYRC.

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Working in the Spending Trends with Pacific Community Resource Society, although challenging, was a great experience and I really learned a lot of new things and skills. I found

that community-based learning is a great way to not only strengthen your knowledge but to learn new skills one would not be able to learn in a classroom setting. This project in particular brought me out of my comfort zone in terms of experience I have with analyzing financial records. I have never done it before in my academic career and would have probably never got a chance to do it if it wasn't for this project. It was a lot of learning by trial and error to see what method or approach would work best for the project and benefit our community partner. Once everything was completed, I finally got a chance to reflect back on everything we accomplished and it was really enjoyable working with my group members as well as the community partner. Moreover, I thought that the flexible learning sessions were extremely helpful in organizing group work as well as meeting with our community partner. Overall, it was a challenging project but very worthwhile.

References:

Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V.. (2009). Food Insecurity and Participation in Community Food Programs among Low-income Toronto Families. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* / *Revue Canadienne De Sante'e Publique*, 100(2), 135–139.