

Running Head: Building Social Capital and Fostering Community Development

HIM: Building Social Capital and Fostering Community Development Through Food

UBC Vancouver

LFS 350 002

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Building Social Capital and Fostering Community Development

Executive Summary

Health Initiative for Men (HIM) is a non-profit organization located in Vancouver's West End. HIM strives to improve the physical, sexual, social, and mental health of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GM&OMSM). In partnership with the Gordon Neighbourhood House (GNH), HIM operates a community based food program called the Rainbow Soup Social (RSS), where participants gather once per week to make soup for that is distributed through a community food hub. This weekly social event aims to use food as a tool in building and strengthening the social relationships within the community. This term, our LFS 350 group partnered with HIM and their Knowledge Translation Manager, Joshua Edward, to make suggestions to improve participation and diversity within their Rainbow Soup Social.

To accomplish this, we conducted an in-depth literature review to assess peer-reviewed academic literature related to community food programs and social capital. The main objective of our literature review was to address the research question "how can community organizations use food as a means to build social capital and foster community development?" From our literature review, we discovered that community food programs such as the RSS provide a safe and comfortable environment that bring people of different ethnicities and cultures together. However, it is important that community food programs reflect the needs and interests of program participants in order to be effective in providing social support and building social capital within the community. Additionally, our group conducted an interview with Joshua to gain insight on how organizations such as HIM develop and implement programs and initiatives such as the RSS.

With the findings presented in our literature review in combination with the interview, we were able to make some suggestions for HIM that may help to increase participation and

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participant diversity in community based food programs. These include the use of social media campaigns, as well as ways that HIM could strengthen community connections to enhance current and future program offerings.

Introduction

For this Community Based Experiential Learning (CBEL) project, our team partnered with HIM to provide suggestions on improving their RSS participation and diversity. The group investigated the use of food as a means to foster community development and build social capital. HIM as well as GNH are located in Vancouver's West End, which includes Davie Village. This area is a hub for the city's GM&OMSM and Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, and Queer (LGTBQ) communities (City of Vancouver, 2012). HIM's mission focuses on strengthening gay men's well-being by promoting trusted research-based health services, while engaging the community through events and participant opportunities. This allows for informed decisions to be made, aligning with their 4 organizational goals - physical, sexual, social, and mental health (Health Initiative for Men, 2013a).

The project strives to provide academic findings that HIM can discuss at their monthly campaign proposal meetings, which includes furthering food-related initiatives beyond the RSS (J. Edward, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Information on HIM's planning and implementation process for their campaigns and services was provided by Joshua. Each event facilitates organizational goals while using the sub-branch to connect social capital with community based food programs (CBFPs) to better support their participants and community.

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As shown in our systems diagram focused on the West End residents and their associated interactions, (Figure 1) two of the most important relationships are:

1. HIM's Davie Street office and its bidirectional connections with the GNH, and St. Paul's Hospital; and
2. GNH and their connections with locally accessible grocery stores which support and supplement HIM's RSS and other community food initiatives and services in the neighbourhood



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- A. Private Donors/Stakeholders (**Vancouver**)
 - Provides funding or resources in partnerships and/or donations
- B. Residents/Participants (**Community**)
 - Contributors to the available programs through insight and/or active participation
- C. HIM Staff/Volunteers (**Organization**)
 - Dedication to facilitating and promoting 4 organizational goals through campaigns and initiatives
- D. Accessible Grocery Stores (**Community**)
 - Supplies fresh and nutritious options to local residents and food-related initiatives
- E. Community Food Initiatives/Services (**Community**)
 - Offering programs through means of food to foster and build social capital
- F. Neighbourhood Gardens/Assets (**Community**)
 - Provides additional low-cost, fresh and nutritious options for community and related food-related initiatives
- G. Vancouver Coastal Health (**Vancouver**)
 - Provides health services infrastructure suitable for City of Vancouver residents
- H. Community Health Professionals (**Community**)
 - Provides trusted, tailored health services through beneficial relationships to ensure best possible outcomes

Figure 1. West End food systems diagram of community organization and their respective Vancouver, Community, and Organization interactions

The project aim was to collect information on food's community impact as a means of creating social capital and fostering community development. Our project objectives were to conduct a literature review and interview our community partner so that we could offer HIM feasible suggestions to consider for future events. This knowledge can contribute to addressing areas of concern brought forth by our literature review and Joshua Edward, including:

1. Create and facilitate stable and inclusive community networks supporting participants; and
2. Expansion of HIM's promotion streams and advocacy messages

Our main inquiry question is: "How can community organizations use food as a means to build social capital and foster community development?".

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Methods

We decided that our project would consist of an in-depth literature review as well as a personal interview with our community partner. This data collection allows us to understand the community that HIM works with on a daily basis and make informed suggestions to improve their current promotional materials.

The literature review focused on the research question “How can community organizations use food as a means to build social capital and foster community development?” Literature was sourced through Web of Science Core Collection, CAB Direct - CAB Abstract & Global Health, Sociological Abstracts, and Google Scholar, limiting the scope from January 1, 2000 through March 9, 2016, to ensure era-accurate research and recommendation suitability. We chose to include research based in Westernized countries to mirror our target population (Vancouver). We also focused on the LGBTQ community as best we could, using keywords such as “*social development*” and “*food*,” paired with “*community development*” and “*gay*” or “*bisexual*.” Overall we included 13 peer-reviewed articles in our literature review that met these criteria.

For the personal interview with Joshua, our questions included clarifying Joshua’s role within the organization and more specifically with the RSS. We also verified HIM’s current promotional material and promotion locations. The focus of this interview was to learn about the Social’s current participants, as well as any feedback previously received about the program, as HIM seeks to expand and diversify their participants. We also inquired about any suggestions Joshua would have based on his firsthand experience. This interview allowed us to gain a better understanding of our community partner’s role in the RSS and HIM in general and provided information needed to make relevant suggestions.

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As we were unable to attend a RSS, our suggestions were aimed for community programs in general. We followed the framework of identifying the area of concern, finding how academics approached this issue as well as finding a social approach, and integrating our own personal suggestions. We followed these steps to offer HIM two suggestions to improve their RSS.

Results

Literature Review

In addressing our research question, certain key themes emerged from our literature review:

- Community stakeholders identified CBFs as a means to build social capital, as they felt that food and food consumption can bring groups together and strengthen communities. Social support systems, social networks and inter-organizational partnerships were identified as keys to success. However, a lack of communication between related community organizations can impede project development (Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, and Isaacs, 2013; Marshall, 2003);
- There are various ways that community initiatives impact social capital and community development. Community gardens and community kitchens provide participants from a diverse range of backgrounds a space to socialize. For historically marginalized populations, these programs help to reduce social isolation and build self-reliance. Participation in multiple community organizations further strengthened community networks (Firth, Maye, and Pearson, 2011; Flach, 2010; Roncarolo, Adam, Bisset, and Potvin, 2015; Tarasuk, 2001; Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014), and;

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- Barriers to participation in community based food programs included but were not limited to: (1) lack of accessibility: not being aware of programs, where they are offered or how to sign up, or programs not being offered in the neighbourhood, (2) lack of program fit: incompatibility with busy schedules, health issues such as disability preventing participation, or a general lack of appeal of programs to their interests, and (3) limited funding and program delivery is often on an ad hoc basis so organizers are not able to promote programs, or may not target all possible groups (Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2013)

Community Partner Interview

We interviewed our community partner, Josh Edward, to gain insight on how non-profit organizations similar HIM, develop and implement community food programs such as the RSS.

Figure 3 presents some of the key points that were highlighted during the discussion.

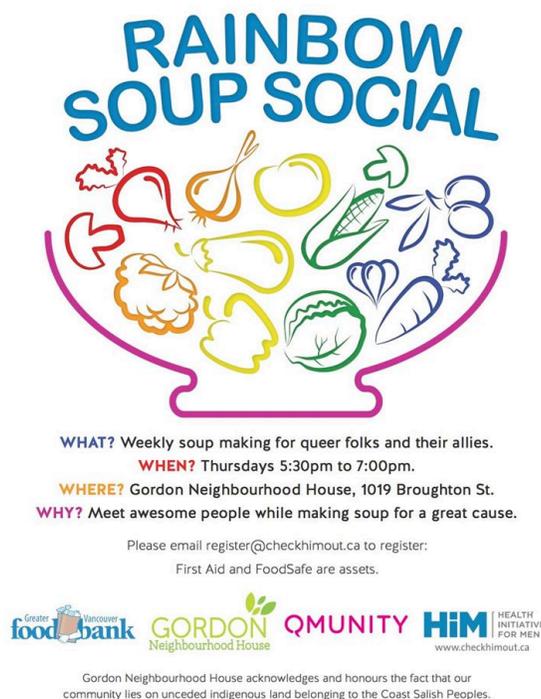


Figure 2. Health Initiative for Men’s Rainbow Soup Social flyer

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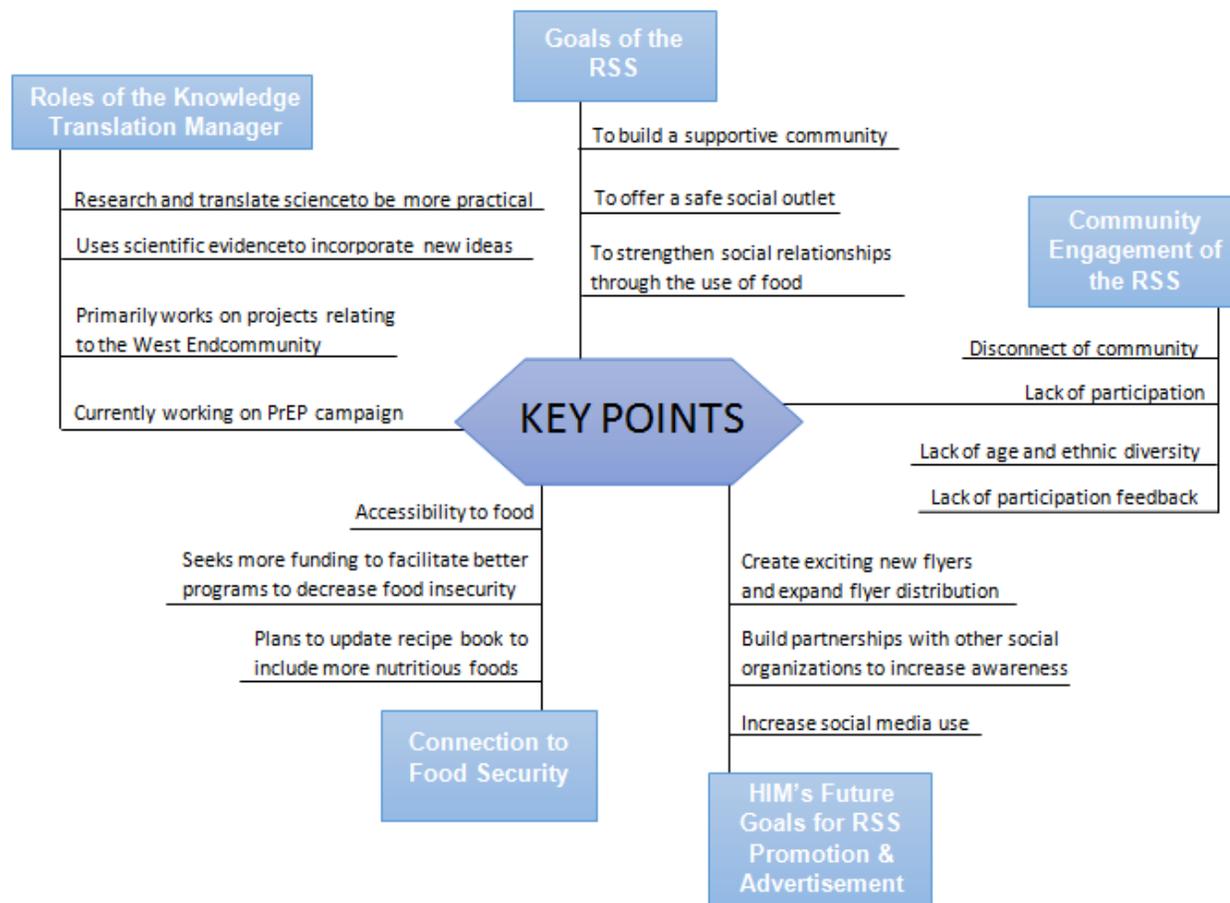


Figure 3. Mind map representation of key ideas presented in the interview

Joshua's role focuses on translating science into science-based evidence to be used on a more practical level in the West End and within the organization. The RSS was started in hopes of "building a sense of community" and strengthening social relationships, by gathering West End GM&OMSM residents together through food. The RSS has "always been a small program" and lacks participant diversity (J. Edward, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Only one flyer is available to promote the RSS (Figure 2). It is displayed at the GNH and HIM's main office. Expansion of promotional outlets include various social organizations such as the Gay-Straight Alliance at post-secondary institutions, in order to reach out to a younger population. HIM would also like to increase the use of social media to promote their events (J. Edward, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Currently, HIM has limited funds to support the RSS,

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and cannot focus on providing healthy, nutritious foods to its members. Creating innovative and exciting recipes to attract participants is their first priority. Ideally, HIM would like to improve their community programs in addressing the incidence of food insecurity. To achieve this, HIM continuously seeks to acquire governments grants, as well as consistent funding from private donors and community stakeholders who have goals that are aligned to HIM's (J. Edward, personal communication, March 28, 2016).

Discussion

Based on the findings from our literature review and interview, we were able to evaluate the role of CBFs in creating social capital and in community capacity building (CCB). We were also able to gain insight into how these programs, including the RSS, operate and the challenges associated with program delivery and participation.

Hamm and Bellows (2003) define community food security (CFS) as “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (p. 1). In addressing CFS, CBFs are important in boosting community self-reliance. Well noted in the literature, CBFs reduce social isolation, providing social support systems and increases self-reliance among participants (Fridman & Lenters, 2013; Iacovou, Pattieson, Truby, & Palermo, 2012; Tarasuk, 2001). These programs build networks of trust and reciprocity that enhance CFS by sharing information which may include food preparation or food resource access.

Social justice may be addressed by CBFs by reducing some of the structural inequalities impacting CFS. Fridman and Lenters (2013) found that local infrastructure including community kitchens can help participants become aware of how municipal food systems decisions are made, which may further engage them in policy advocacy. Together, this links people that experience

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food insecurity or are interested in food security issues, giving them a greater political voice.

While there are many ways that CBFs seek to enhance CFS, smaller scales do not address all CFS components simultaneously. RSS' primary goal is to create social opportunities using food as a medium. Food purchases for the event tend to be centered on sourcing product economically. Increasing participation in food related programs in the future may allow HIM to broaden the scope of their program to include CFS considerations including nutrition or sustainability.

In addition to improving CFS, CBFs also contribute to community development. From our literature review, we found that stakeholders viewed CBFs as a means to build social capital and strengthen community networks. Social capital is a key component of Asset Based Community Development. In a literal sense, social capital is the store of goodwill and obligations generated by social relations" (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 479). Social capital is a latent asset for community development which can be used to mobilize other assets. For example, people can make use of the social capital present in relationships in times of food insecurity to ensure their needs are met or connecting CBFs together for greater access.

Fridman and Lenters (2013) also highlight CBFs as a means for CCB, where community kitchen programs often operate with other community initiatives, allowing for participants to be engaged in numerous programs, to create more resilience. These connections foster dialogue between stakeholders and local governments to identify barriers to equitable access and suggest policy improvements regarding CBFs (Fridman and Lenters, 2013).

Barriers to participation in CBFs can limit their ability to build capacity and social capital. Our literature review found that a lack of accessibility, including the lack of program awareness, was a significant barrier to participation, further exacerbating due to smaller program

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scales, resulting in a limited ability to promote effectively (Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2013). To improve both participant numbers as well as diversity, it may be beneficial for HIM to explore social media as a means to promote programs, as well as to seek out new locations for promotion.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, we were unable to attend a RSS, and as such were unable to offer specific promotional materials. Because of this, our project shifted in focus from building upon existing physical assets to exploring how HIM could use food as a means to build social capital through community based food programs. We were able to gain insight to the RSS through our community partner interview, but dialogue with multiple stakeholders would have enabled us to gain a more detailed picture of the event so that we could tailor our suggestions, which are instead more broad in nature. Existing members indicate that the current group composition does not represent their community (J. Edward, personal communication, March 28, 2016). This is where the ‘Age Profile’ component of the West End Community Profile provides the group with baseline demographic data (Tables 1 and 2). With individuals’ age groups 20-64 representing 82% of the West End, it may seem that the age diversity already exists, but it is also easy to overlook their ability to participate according to their observed genders and sexual orientations - ultimately showing a weakness in available grey literature (City of Vancouver, 2012).

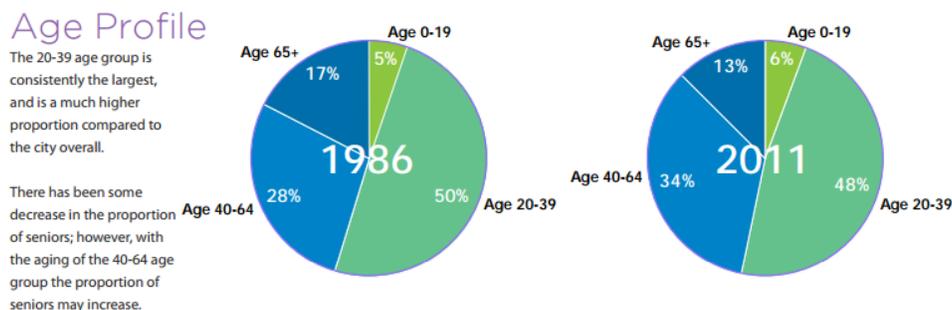


Table 1. Age profile composition in 1986 and 2011 (City of Vancouver, 2012)

2011	West End	City of Vancouver
Age Groups		
19 and under	6%	17%
20-39	48%	34%
40-64	34%	36%
65 and over	13%	14%

Table 2. Age profile of West End compared to the City of Vancouver in its entirety (City of Vancouver, 2012)

Conclusions

Community based food programs such as the RSS provide an excellent space in gathering people with diverse backgrounds together to build social capital and promote community development. From the data collected by our group, we can safely acknowledge that community based food initiatives are feasible to explore in the West End.

We discovered that although CBFPs have been shown to be highly beneficial for social health and mental well-being, some barriers that restrict new member participation include the possibility of scheduling conflicts and the inability to attend events, given accessibility issues. Another barrier that arose was the lack of outreach actions directed at promoting these programs. Unfortunately, a common trend that requires immediate attention is the limited promotional measures available, as non-profit organizations have restricted resources and low budgets. Limited funding hinders the promotion of programs, which becomes a barrier for numerous participants.

Thus, using the information gathered from the literature review in combination with the findings from the interview, we suggest that HIM expand the promotion of the RSS in order to raise awareness and further increase participation according to our suggestions listed in Appendix 1.

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Critical Reflections

“Overall, my experience with the LFS 350 CBEL project was challenging. When our project scope and focus changed so suddenly, it brought with it a lot of anxiety and uncertainty. I had to let go of the more comfortable notion of simply preparing some promotional posters and recipes and explore an area of food security discourse with which I was largely unfamiliar. The flexible learning experiences, including meetings with our community partner, library research staff and our group sessions helped to clarify our new objectives and research strategies. I found that one of the more challenging components of the project were the blog posts. I appreciated the blogs as a means to articulate our weekly objectives and reflect on the project as it was in progress, but at times writing to meet the requirements outlined in the grading rubric felt at odds with the more conversational writing that I would normally associate with blogging. Having a group that worked well together was crucial to the successful completion of this project. Despite the challenges that I encountered, I feel that I have become more resilient and I value the opportunity to learn about dimensions of community food security that I likely would not have been able to explore if not for the LFS 350 CBEL project.” -Student 1

“This LFS 350 CBEL project has been difficult but rewarding as I have learned more about the fundamentals of community initiatives through the trials and tribulations experienced this semester. With the underlying “knowledge” of the adversity faced by the individuals of our index community and the sudden change in our project’s focus, this led me to feeling the emotions of anger, anxiety, stress, and helplessness. Recognizing early on that, despite wanting to do more, there was only so much I could offer in a short amount of time, but I was comfortable with the options proposed to make our contributions worthwhile. However, the sudden change, I felt that my impact would be less than stellar given that it was a topic that I was

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unacquainted to. Leaning heavily on academic (and some grey) literature, I felt I garnered a respectable understanding of the current situation. While it was beneficial to the group and our responsibilities, I found myself trending on the path of salvationism as I was only considering one side of the social construct. The organization's perspectives were critical and just as important, if not more, to consider as it best represents their observations. I appreciated the challenge to encourage others to reconsider their stance on incremental change, in comparison to the assumption that rapid change was the best solution for community initiatives. The resiliency of the group allowed me to see it clearer and uphold the belief that one small change and its ripple effect leads to greater changes." - Student 2

"Personally, this CBEL project was valuable because it provided me with the academic experience to work as part of a team to complete numerous tasks. It was interesting to work with a non-profit organization such as HIM, and to learn about their goals and community initiatives. From the information gathered through the literature review and the interactions with our community partner, it was shocking to discover the various challenges that communities face daily. However, one of the negative experiences was that our project scope changed multiple times throughout the term, which brought upon frustration and disappointment. Although it was quite a challenge to maintain a positive attitude, our group managed to work together efficiently, despite the obstacles we faced. This project was an excellent example of how things sometimes do not go as expected or initially presented, and therefore, it has further strengthened my ability to adapt to changes quickly. Because of the various changes that occurred, this project further enhanced my time management and problem solving skills. I also learnt to interact with my peers and to express my concerns in a more professional manner. I strongly believe that the skills I've developed this term will greatly prepare me for future endeavours." - Student 3

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“My experience with LFS 350 was quite a roller coaster ride. I was optimistic about the community projects after Will had described each one to us in class. After being assigned to one of our top choices, I couldn’t wait to get started. It was interesting to learn so much about an organization that I had never heard of before. Hearing about new ways that food-based events are being incorporated into the community was definitely an upside to this project. On the other hand, we did struggle to define our goals and scope for this project. After a few weeks of stress I had to learn that no project is ever perfect, and being flexible and able to go along with changes along the way is an integral part of being involved in a community program such as HIM’s RSS. This project was definitely valuable in the sense that it taught my group and I how to work together and remain positive under times of high stress. It also gave me an insight into the struggles and rewards of playing a role in a real life community program. Overall I was glad to be able to contribute valuable suggestions to HIM’s RSS and believe it will help me in any future group work.” - Student 4

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Key Suggestions

1. Develop and distribute survey of community food assets within West End

Building from the success of the literature review and the idea of furthering food-related initiatives beyond the RSS, we believe it is imperative to develop a detailed survey of community food assets available in the West End. This will allow HIM to visualize the current resources available in their neighbourhood which leads into larger and stronger partnerships. Currently, HIM has 26 community sponsors who help make seemingly limited resources into the greatest impact (Health Initiative for Men, 2013b). The group recommends that the detailed survey be distributed to these sponsors to establish a resource baseline. From these results, HIM and their partners and stakeholders are able to identify areas of sufficiency and areas to address. As an attempt address these gaps, HIM may entertain the idea of contacting other Davie Village companies and neighbouring organizations to gauge their interest on community food asset management.

2. Boost participation and event awareness through targeted social media campaigns

In addition, with the increase in social media popularity, the group believes that this is an explorable option to boost participation. Currently, HIM has an embedded website hyperlink to their Twitter handle @HIMTweets, which boasts 1705 followers. The group recommends that HIM should explore the possibility of expanding the current Communications Manager's role to include social media responsibilities. Another option will be to hire a Social Media expert and expand their brand onto Facebook and Instagram. This individual will be able to make targeted posts using the medium's analytics data to ensure the messages are reaching the intended individuals.

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Appendix 2 – Knowledge Translation Manager Interview Details

1. Community Organization Details

Question: What are HIM's short (6 months) and long-term (12 months) organizational goals?

- Continue to maintain organizational vision to reflect stakeholders' to ensure HIM's programs and events are suitable
- Explore option of larger presence on social media improving existing website, and maximize the flexibility of no standalone budget
- Relaying message to community organizers, general public, and participants of the true feasibility of "rapid change" - necessity to explain the logistical barriers observed and experienced, equating to "incremental change" being most applicable for their organization

2. Community Partner Details

Question: How would you describe your role as the Knowledge Translation Manager?

- Main responsibility to translate academic and scientific knowledge to create evidence to be used in practical manner for community and organizational settings
- Focuses primarily on sexual health and related areas of concern
- Common themes are to be determined - eating disorders - while offsetting general observed issues
- Responsibilities are noted to differ week by week, overseeing 5-10 campaigns are various stages, ranging from proposal, planning, implementing, in-progress, conclusion/de-brief, will also facilitate focus groups, surveys
- Current predominant campaign focus is PrEP: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

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- Always inquiring on possibility to secure government grants - typically will require 12 month turnaround - or from private investors and stakeholders - varying timeline
- Expressed interest in promoting at post-secondary institutions but most participants are 18 or older

Question: How would you describe your Aaron's role as the Mental Health Program Manager?

- Oversees mental health socials, involved with central health, counselling, psychology on smaller regard
- Semi-regular RSS staff member attendee, echoing need for more diversity
- Reports to Executive Director when presenting new campaign ideas

3. Connection to Areas of Concern with Food Security

Question: What are the available food-related resources provided by HIM and what is the participants' reception to them?

- Participants appreciative of the available resources, citing positive experiences when involved in HIM events
- Observed under-representation of the community, indicating the need to make areas of concerns more than simply food or seeing food as a standalone
- HIM works proactively with the GNH as they provide the gathering and kitchen space to run the weekly RSS
- Community garden space is available for participants but only one active individual tends to it

4. Rainbow Soup Social Details

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Question: What are the general thoughts of the active participants?

- Must first establish how to involve more individuals, maintain weekly membership numbers, to build a successful, tight-knit community
- Social has been operating since 2009-10 but no current staff members have been here during entire duration
- With the current composition, approximately the same number of individuals come by each week
- Recognized by the staff and active participants as small program but eager to spread the word to create composition that better represents the community
- Single promotional flyer is considered “not particularly exciting nor engaging”
- Only advertised internally and the GNH hence the importance of outreach
- Very accepting environment spurred on by being very participant driven - typically 1 HIM staff member, along with volunteers and the participants
- All HIM staff members are encouraged to participate

Question: How can we create nutritious, culturally diverse recipes, suitable with ingredients received by HIM from their community partners?

- Must consider the food options and its accessibility within the West End
- Given non-profit organization, budget towards RSS is smaller
- Healthy recipes and nutrition are appreciated but not necessarily the number one priority
- Given participant driven framework, members typically will create suitable recipes themselves after considering budget and available resources
- Typically will source ingredients that match their “more bang for [their] buck” motto

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- Would entertain the possibility of ongoing funding from local producers, distributors, food promoters

Question: What are some areas of improvements brought forth by the organization and the participants?

- RSS is struggling to maintain their presence at GNH
- Has not explored option to evaluate participation through surveys or related mediums
- Proactively searching for means to integrate food and cooking for different social groups and events
- Lack of participation influences thoughts of feeling inadequately representative in community setting
- Holds the potential to be larger than it is currently, but missing the link to expand
- Difficulty in gauging whether meals are innovating and exciting and whether their current options are appealing enough to attract more men
- Look into option of possibly holding focus group to ask why they do not participate, especially if they attend other HIM-organized events
- Expand volunteer opportunities to include the community gardening space

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