

**GORDON NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:
PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN COMMUNITY LUNCHES**

GROUP 16 - LFS 350
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1942, the Gordon Neighborhood House (GNH) is a community hub located in the West End of Vancouver that includes over 400 members (Gordon Neighborhood House, 2016). Serving as the “landing pad” for immigrants, the West End community received 14% of Vancouver’s newcomers in the past decade, which contributed to diversity in cultures and socio-economical statuses among the population (City of Vancouver, 2012). According to the West End community profile (2012), low income and inadequate access to food are identified as key issues in this region. From day camps to urban farming, GNH utilizes its dynamic programs and initiatives to combat these issues, supporting members in need and nourishing the community with fresh, nutritious food. GNH also embraces a philosophy that recognizes food as a vehicle for community building as well to facilitate intercultural exchange and dialogue (Gordon Neighborhood House, 2016).



Fig 1. Map of the West End of Vancouver community area. The red dashed lines represent the West End community boundary, and the location of GNH is represented by the green house icon in the middle of the map (Figure modified from City of Vancouver, 2012)

cheap, overly-processed convenience foods (Poladian, 2016). GNH’s PWYC lunch program is an example of a traditional community intervention to improve food security, which has been

In this project, we collaborated with GNH to plan, prepare and serve two healthy, low cost lunches called Wednesday’s Pay-What-You-Can (PWYC) lunch. The lunches offer members homemade food with fresh wholesome ingredients at a low cost. Homemade food tends to have reduced calories, sodium, and fat content, which can lead to better health outcomes than eating

shown to positively impact participants' physical and mental health status by providing nutritious and affordable food (Roncarolo *et al.*, 2016). Our main objectives for this project are to:

1. Select, prepare and serve two low-cost, nutritious and sustainable meals for the GNH PWYC Wednesday lunch program;
2. Help to improve the PWYC lunch program by creating a meal plan that is enjoyed by the majority of community members.

Our goals were to contribute to GNH's ongoing efforts to improve community food security through adequate and nutritious food intake. We hoped to learn about the process of planning and delivering a healthy community meal on a budget, to gain insight on the operations of non-profit neighbourhood associations, and to advance our understanding of food security levels in the West End of Vancouver. By the end of this project, we seek to answer the following inquiry questions:

1. How effective is our meal plan in terms of cost-efficiency, nutrition and sustainability for the GNH Wednesday lunch program?
2. How satisfied are the community members with the newly introduced meal?

METHODS

Two lunches were served: the first being soup and sandwiches which were part of the regular menu for the program, and the second one being a new meal that we created. To obtain information on the planning and selection of our new meal, we conducted an interview with the community partner, Chantile, during our first visit to learn about the food varieties available, budget (see Appendix B), and meal expectations. Casual conversations with the



Fig 2. Kitchen for community lunch preparation in the Gordon Neighborhood House (Photo credit: Ula Zhu, Group 16)

lunch program participants were also made to find out individual food preferences. Finally, we chose a vegetarian chili with pita bread and a seasonal green salad as our new meal.

The program supervisor and a kitchen volunteer were interviewed at the end of the project regarding our first inquiry question. To answer our second inquiry question, comment cards were given to lunch participants during both meals to assess their satisfaction with each meal (see Appendix C). Participants would score the meal on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest quality. A section for comments on future improvements or explanations of score given was also available. Observations were conducted on the participants' overall experiences, such as facial expressions during the meal, were noted by group members. Minimal data analysis was involved in this project, due to the qualitative nature of data collected.

The panel on research ethics, *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)* was successfully completed by all group members. During the project, we treated the members of GNH and each other fairly, equally, and with respect, while taking everyone's welfare into consideration during data collection. All data has been kept confidential.

RESULTS

Participants' rating for meal 1 (sandwich & soup) showed an average score of 3.8 with seventeen members participating. Meal 2 (chili & salad) had an average score of 4.4 with fifteen members participating. We observed that members were receptive to our presence.

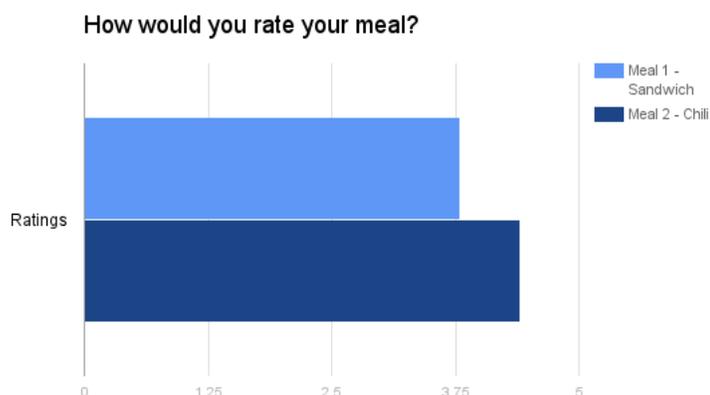


Fig 3. Average scores of the two different lunches served by participating community members at GNH.

We found that many members enjoyed the change in menu. Our community partner had mentioned that the soup and sandwich meal is “boring,” however, after surveying the members we discovered that the meal was satisfactory and the problem was the quantity of

food. In regards to the chili, surveys revealed that the bread was an important part to the meal. Our observations illustrated that community members enjoyed the meal with friends and family.

We were unable to determine the effectiveness of our meal in terms of cost-efficiency, nutrition and sustainability. While we provided the ingredient list the purchasing was done by our community partner, and the final cost was not disclosed. With regards to nutrition, we were unable to compare the nutrients in the sandwiches to the chili. Many ingredients were acquired from the farm and various grocery stores so exact amounts of nutrients were difficult to assess. As food, nutrition, and health and food science students, we used our well-rounded knowledge of food to choose a meal that we thought was nutritious (low in sodium and fat, and high fibre).

DISCUSSION

The definition of community food security includes: food availability, affordability, accessibility and quality (McCullum *et al.*, 2005). The PWYC lunch program has addressed affordability and accessibility by directly offering meals at a low price. We contributed to GNH's approach of community food security by creating a healthy meal that can be used in the future for their program. Although, chili is not the solution to the overarching problem of food security in the West End of Vancouver, it represents a first step for GNH by increasing variety and quality in their Wednesday PWYC menu. Members expressed satisfaction because of the variety of the chili.

Our observations and interviews show that the lunch program is much more than just an option for hunger relief, but it is a place where people can get together and connect with one another, which aligns with GNH's vision of "respond[ing] to the needs and dreams of the community" (Gordon Neighborhood House, 2016).

Our project uses an approach called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD is an approach for community-based development, and a strategy for sustainable community-driven development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2010). It focuses on the unique capacities and resources in a community while planning for developmental actions (Valley, 2016). The PWYC lunch program utilizes their community kitchen resources and communal spaces for food system development.

Other meal programs like PWYC directly meet nutritional needs of those who don't have access to kitchen amenities (Miewald & Ostry, 2014). According to a study done by Miewald & Ostry (2014), 13% of residents split their meals between home cooking and charitable programs; therefore, indicating the importance of meal programs in a community setting. The PWYC program of GNH serves as a critical role not only for food security promotion, but also in a social context. Food is often used to create greater social bonds with others in the community and enhance sociability among community members (Miewald & Ostry, 2014). The lunches at GNH encourage communication and engagement between participants sitting around the table.

To improve the PWYC program, we observed and interviewed the participants before we made our second visit. Building community food security requires a good understanding of the interactions between community members in the social and physical environment (McCullum *et al.*, 2005). Learning the preferences and target populations of the community centre altered our ideas of promotion of community food security.

A limitation of our methods is that our results were only based on two visits. We made assumptions that may have affected the accuracy of our results. One of the assumptions was that opinions of the participants are representative of other members of the West End community. In addition, our small sample size may cause the data to be over-generalized in reflecting the opinions of the community members. The second assumption is that the surveys were done assuming the participants in the first lunch were present in the second lunch. However, some of the participants may not have been exposed to both lunches to accurately compare the two. To improve our findings, we could have had more visits to include a better variety of participants. By doing so, the data collected could be more representative in reflecting the opinions of members in the West End of Vancouver. Finally, to advance this project, a follow-up with our community partner is needed in order to produce a better understanding of the effectiveness of our meal.

CONCLUSION

This project has shown that community lunch programs are a big step towards providing food security for low income individuals. They provide a safe, welcoming space for individuals

to enjoy a wholesome, home-cooked meal. As a key finding, shared meals contribute to the overall well-being of people and pave a path towards food security.

We suggest creating a program that focuses on low cost food preparation and food purchasing skills because it could benefit GNH members. Providing people with the necessary skills to cook low cost, nutritious meals in addition to grocery shopping education would be a step towards combatting food insecurity in the West End of Vancouver. With the suggested initiatives, it is our hope to provide GNH with strategies to ameliorate food insecurity issues of their community members.

REFERENCES

- City of Vancouver. (2012). West end: Exploring the community. Retrieved from vancouver.ca/files/cov/profile-west-end-2012.pdf
- Gordon Neighbourhood House. (2016). Gordon Neighbourhood House. Retrieved from <http://gordonhouse.org/about-gordon-neighbourhood-house/>
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 474-486. doi:10.1080/0961452032000125857
- McCullum, C., Desjardins, E., Kraak, V. I., Ladipo, P., & Costello, H. (2005). Evidence-based strategies to build community food security. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 105(2), 278-283. doi:10.1016/j.jada.2004.12.015
- Miewald, C., & Ostry, A. (2014). A warm meal and a bed: Intersections of housing and food security in vancouver's downtown eastside. *Housing Studies*, 29(6), 709-729. doi:10.1080/02673037.2014.920769
- Poladian, C. (2016). Health Benefits of Home-Cooked Meals. Retrieved from <http://www.medicaldaily.com/health-benefits-home-cooked-meals-242919>
- Roncarolo, F., Bisset, S., & Potvin, L. (2016). Short-term effects of traditional and alternative community interventions to address food insecurity: E0150250. *PLoS One*, 11(3) doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0150250
- Valley, W. (2016). *Course: LFS 350/Week 02* [Lecture Notes]. Retrieved from http://wiki.ubc.ca/Course:LFS350/Week_02

APPENDIX A - Critical Reflections

Student 1:

At first, everything that we talked about in class seemed irrelevant and boring but as we went deeper into our CBEL project, everything that the professor said was becoming a reality. It felt like we had a sense of direction but along the middle we got lost and then finally found our way again, just like the story that was told about the little girl in the beginning of the semester. I thought that the group work was a great experience as well. I was lucky to be part of a group where everyone supported each other and helped each other; we used our individual assets and brought them to the project and group work and it made me realize that working as a group may have great benefits rather than working alone. We all contributed different ideas from our perspectives and with them all integrated, I think all our assignments and projects were better than what we would have come up with on our own. Flexible learning dates were very critical to our success in this course since all of us have different schedules. It gave us a time to all meet to figure out our next steps. While we were communicating over the internet, meeting in person was the obvious better choice when it came to important aspects of our projects.

Student 2:

This CBEL project was definitely a learning experience. At first, when I heard we were going to have to do another group project, I was quite skeptical; as they can be quite difficult, especially being a University student and everyone has other classes they need to focus on. Fortunately, we were able to utilize our flexible learning times to work with our community partner. This allowed us to not have to take any extra time out of our busy schedules to work on the majority of our project. As well as, once we were done our part with our community partner, we had an extra period to be able to work on the project all together. For assignments and work that we were unable to get done during these times we set up an online discussion forum and an online documents system. This not only allowed us to complete tasks on time but it also allowed us to help each other get through the project as a whole. Since this was a group project, it was critical that we worked together for the success of our project; 'you are only as strong as your weakest link.' Overall, the unity and integrity of our group was what allowed us to successfully complete our project, and make it a pleasant learning experience for all.

Student 3:

I would say that most of our group members had similar experiences with our CBEL project. I knew from day one that our goals coincided; we all desire to help the community as well as work as a team to achieve satisfying marks. As a group, we all have varying strengths and weaknesses and were able to support each other with our strengths, and fall back on group members if need be. As for our project, we were fortunate to work with GNH. As a whole, our project was rewarding because I felt that we contributed to the well-being of others. In addition, we learned proficient interpersonal skills. We handled our flexible learning times well. We were all able to visit GNH on our own time before the first meal. This quickened the process. For the first two of our flexible learning sessions, we were able to finish our time at GNH. This allowed us to utilize our final flexible learning session for the infographic and final project preparation. Using google drive was a useful tool for all of us. We simply made a folder titled “LFS 350” and shared it with each group member. There we could access word and excel documents for blogs, assignments and data. In all, the perseverance and cohesion of our group members made this experience a memorable one.

Student 4:

I highly enjoyed the process of completing this CBEL project. It combined theoretical knowledge and practical community work into one framework and enabled us to experience the process of community development in person. One significant moment that I remembered was when we were setting up the meal plan for our project. We first thought of introducing two completely new meal and were stuck on which one to choose. Our community partner kindly suggested us to serve the original lunch (sandwich & soup) first and then let the community members decide what they would like for their second meal, given that a change can be made. This suggestion reminded us about the concept of Asset-Based-Community-Development (ABCD), which we learned in class before implementing our project. At this moment we all realized that we almost made the mistake of enforcing our own judgement of what the community members wanted into the planning of the new meal. We should be listening to and understanding the needs of the community members who participated in the lunch program, and then set up a meal plan according to their preferences. This experience allowed me to re-think the importance of practical work in the community as it indeed enhanced our understanding of

concepts learned in lectures. Moving on, I look forward to doing more community based work to advance of knowledge of community building learned in LFS 350, as well as to experience the challenges and realities of community development that could not be learned in class.

Student 5:

I find that this CBEL was a great learning experience for everyone in my group. It allows me to learn and apply how to communicate with experts in the real working industry. At first, I was a bit worried and nervous to meet my group members since I did not know any one of them before. However, after our first meeting I was relieved to see that we seems to be able to work well as a group. We were able to set Facebook group as our communication platform and I am glad that everyone was able to have quick responses when any one of us brought up any ideas. As a group we spent our flexible learning to visit GNH twice and use the remaining flexible learning time slot for our group meeting. We also set up a google drive folder to organize our project findings and assignment documents. Throughout the term, we were able to avoid any conflicts among our groupmates. This allows us to finish our tasks more efficiently and make the whole learning experience an enjoyable one. We were lucky to have GNH as our community partner as they were able to give us helpful feedbacks for the project. All in all, working on this CBEL project allows me to improve my interpersonal skills and learnt a lot about Neighborhood houses in Vancouver.

Student 6:

I found the CBEL project rewarding and allows us to apply what we learned in class to the current food system. We were able to develop a healthy meal plan and improve the lunch experience for community members based on our understanding of food security. Observing GNH's approach to improve current issues in the food system is different from reading articles and discussion in class. I saw the community partner's difficulty such as limited resource, funding and time, and realized there are many alternative approaches to improve food security. For example, we as students can volunteer at community center, plan lunch menu with more healthy options, or improve food literacy for community members, etc. Regarding the groupwork, our group was able to allocate work load equally among group members and take advantage of strengths of each of us. We exchanged ideas promptly when any of us has new ideas or

suggestions. Our group consists of students from different majors and background in Land and Food Systems, which allows us to share different perspectives and we definitely learned a lot from each other. The flexible learning experiences such as blog postings helped us to critically reflect on the CBEL project on most of the significant moments. The blogs are available to our community partners, which is sustainable to help this CBEL project. Looking forward, I hope this project can be carried on by the next group of students in LFS350 and help more community members in terms of food security.

APPENDIX B - Budget

GNH lunches are ‘Pay-What-You-Can’, so we must be conscious of the cost. By using harvests produced by the GNH farm and choosing low-cost ingredients, we aim for \$10-\$60 per 35 servings depending on the availability of seasonal harvest from the community farm.

APPENDIX C - Sample Comment Card

Date: Wednesday October 26th, 2016.

Please rate your meal and explain your choice. (1 = poor, 5 = exceptional)

1

2

3

4

5

How would you like the meal to be improved for next time?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!