

Hastings Sunrise Community Food Circles

Final Report

April 10, 2017

Group 22

Introduction

The aim of this project is to identify culturally appropriate and realistic projects that can increase access to healthy food and address community food insecurity within the Hastings-Sunrise community. This project was done through a joint effort with Hastings Sunrise Community Food Network (HSCFN). HSCFN consists of a network of service providers (Thunderbird Community Centre, Hastings Community Centre, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House, and City Reach) in the Hastings-Sunrise (HS) area that aim to improve food security in the HS community. The demographics of the Hastings Sunrise community is diverse. The population speaks mainly English (41.8%) and Chinese (35.4%) and the remaining percentage speaks Italian, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Spanish. The average size of a household is 2.8 people (higher than the total Vancouver average of 2.2 people) and 19.4% of families are single parent (also higher than the Vancouver average of 16.3%) (Statistics Canada, Census, 2011).

The HSCFN recently drafted a report on barriers to food access as identified by the Hastings-Sunrise community. While budget was identified as the primary constraint to accessing food, other more complex factors such as mobility and knowledge of substitutions for already-known recipes were also indicated as barriers or constraints to food security (Diamanti and Chesney 2017). This report was the result of a series of “food circles” or focus groups that discussed food security issues in the neighborhood. Our project is significant because it employs principles of grassroots approaches to food insecurity in using focus groups to direct the future of food programming in the community. Not only does this approach promote strong dialogue that informs the non-profits involved what the issues of concern are in the community, effectively advancing food justice by granting procedural power to historically marginalised populations (Slocum 2006), but it also serves as a means to activate the people and resources in the community in an act of asset-based community development (Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

Our two project objectives were to firstly analyse the results of the two final focus groups of the Community Food Circles Project, held at the Hastings-Sunrise Community Centre, and secondly identify implementable projects that will address the recommendations given in the focus groups, through one of the service providers in the HSCFN.

To address these two objectives, we had two questions in mind:

1. What do the residents of the Hastings Sunrise community want/need in order to improve their food security?
2. What is one project that can be implemented within practicality?

Methods

Data to answer our above questions was collected in three ways: through focus groups, four held prior to our involvement in the project and one during our involvement, in a feedback session for the project held on January 26 (see Appendix 1), and in a community market stand in which we sought to informally seek input from community members, while generating awareness for the Hastings Community Centre and for the activities of the local Neighbourhood food network.

Focus groups are a community engagement tool that can inform programming to increase food security and can even be used to guide policy. The focus group model has been used across Canada to better understand the barriers around food security and how to address them. Food Secure Canada implemented a tremendous project over the course of two years to create a participatory food system, which successfully put food sovereignty into the conversation around food policy and has established many policy recommendations to further advance food sovereignty's agenda. (Food Secure Canada, 2011). The People's Food Policy hosted over 350 Kitchen Table Talk gatherings, or focus groups, ranging in size and diversity around food security. These Table Talk gatherings informed which food policies were to be advocated for at a communal, municipal, or federal level (Kneen, 2012). The focus groups are very similar to the Hastings-Sunrise food circles as they gathered neighbors or co-workers in an informal setting to discuss different barriers to implementing food policy (Kneen, 2012). Although the Kitchen Table Talk gatherings were a national initiative to address larger issues that threatens food security, it provides important insight on the use of focus groups and how this methodology can be scaled.

For these focus groups, 8 facilitators were trained to hold these at various service provider locations. In total, there were 49 participants in all focus groups, 45 of whom were female and 4 of whom were male. These focus groups in their design prioritised respect of confidentiality of the participants involved. Participants held the right to withdraw without consequence and the data collected remained confidential. Clear explanations were provided to ensure that all participants understood the nature of the study. Participants must give an informed consent, usually a written agreement prior to participating in the research (Schacter et al., 2014). Each was offered a \$15 gift card, bus tickets, and child minding.

There were five focus group questions that were revised following the fourth focus group and before the fifth. These are below. In the previous version of the questions, the current questions 4 and 5 were presented in the opposite order, which was frustrating as the discussion on local food was found to be redundant given the discussion that would take place after discussing current barriers. Thus, we placed this question immediately after the discussion on barriers so that the discussion could transition more naturally to what appeared to be a related topic. We also added guiding subquestions to promote meaningful results (See Appendix 2)

Results

In the first four focus groups they found that funds and transportation remained the most significant and pervasive barriers. Knowledge of where to seek support and learn useful skills were also identified as gaps. After the first four focus groups there was a feedback session to review the data found and to have more of a discussion on the topic. Many gaps were identified and it allowed our group to be able to identify new questions for the upcoming focus groups. The fifth focus group were asked our revised questions, however after a few questions all of the participants who attended stated that they were not food insecure. This caused them to have a difficult time relating to the questions; however they were able to help identify some barriers that restrict others from accessing food. We ran into a similar problem when we attended the Hasting Sunrise Farmer Market. We found that the market stand was a good way to access people living in the Hastings-Sunrise area; however it did not provide access to those who are food insecure. This created a big challenge for how to create programs that are appropriate and

can access those who need it. With the information provided our implementable project should focus on the educational aspect as it came up in all the focus groups. Most participants of the focus groups mentioned that money was an issue in accessing nutritious and healthy meals. Having better education and knowledge could help tackle these issues. It would also be beneficial to teach them general shopping and cooking skills that they could reuse. These workshops would focus on teaching participants how to shop on a budget while choosing the most nutritious options, as well as how to cook simple and healthy recipes with limited ingredients.

Discussion

As Conner and Levine (2007) state, community food based systems (CFS) offer underlying solutions to food insecurity, in addition to many other problems that communities face in the present day. The overall purpose of this project was to identify the issues of food insecurity in the community, and to create a food pilot program for the community. Dialogue from the focus groups helped us understand what individuals thought were the main issues in the community. Many people brought up the idea of increasing the educational aspect of learning how to purchase food on a budget, or learning how to grow their own food. This idea is reflected in the TED talk that was given by Ernesto Sirillo, a sustainable development expert, where he elaborates that if individuals want to help solve a problem within a community we should “shut up and listen!” (TED, 2012) He describes an idea that portrays if individuals/groups want to help a community, they first need to become servants of the local passion, and servants of the local people that want to do better. By putting what we previously have learned at school to the back of our mind, and listening to the feedback that we were given in the focus groups before applying our teachings, we realized that it would be of great interest to help create programs that help educate families and individuals within the Hastings-Sunrise community about things such as food budgeting, food production, and cooking. This suggestion is made tentatively because even though this pilot program will aid the community in some way, we found that a large amount of the individuals who were present for the focus groups were not experiencing food insecurity, and some had never experienced food security in their lifetime. This made it difficult to gain great insight into exactly what the community needs, but these discussions were helpful and helped to solidify how the project will be handled moving forward. Finding future focus group participants will hopefully be more targeted towards people having trouble with food security. In this way, the project will better target the community that this project is focusing on. It is also recommended that the focus groups and programming would occur as closely as possible to the vulnerable population, as transportation and not having enough time were found to be large hurdles to participation. The future creation of more focus groups that will self-reflect on the pilot projects that have been recommended by our findings will give insight into how successful this programming is.

Conclusion

The Community Food Circles project has so far demonstrated that barriers to food assets and programming such as funding and mobility remain challenging for many people who have experienced food insecurity. However, opportunities exist for the Hastings-Sunrise Community Food Network in filling the gap of basic skills in food acquisition and preparation that

can empower community members in their day-to-day lives. Discovering this was the primary outcome of this research so that will inform the next steps, but other outcomes such as the fostering of a strong community of support through these focus groups and the feedback session can be listed.

The next steps in the Community Food Circles project is to implement new programming that is informed by the findings of these focus groups this Spring. Eventually, follow up in the form of additional focus groups to provide feedback for the new programming itself. In order to involve vulnerable community members from whom it is challenging to hear, but whose voices are sorely needed to inform the development of a just food system, we recommend holding focus groups in spaces beyond those that belong within the Hastings-Sunrise Community Food Network.

Critical Reflections:

Student 1:

My experience working with the Hastings Sunrise Community Food Network was a positive one, although at times challenging. It was interesting to learn about the process that goes into community program planning. I was surprised by the pace of our project, often times feeling that it was too slow and that we were not doing very much. It seemed like our project was at HSCFN was during an “in-between” phase; where the “food circles” project was completed (for the most part) and the food programming wasn’t ready to be implemented yet. I found this limbo between projects challenging because there was less clarity on what we were supposed to be doing as a group. I think that our group, overall, worked very cohesively. It was clear that everyone was energetic and willing to contribute to the work. Additionally, I really enjoyed using the piktochart, online platform, to make our infographic.

Student 2:

The experience of working in a group on this community project was rewarding. It provided an opportunity to enter the world of an activist community in Vancouver working towards food justice and to discuss and think about the challenge of trying to achieve this effectively and meaningfully. Being involved in this work and reflecting critically on our experience in situ was an exciting classroom experience that brought about questions that would hardly come up in a classroom setting.

As a group work experience, I felt we all worked effectively together and contributed each in our own significant way. Specifically in this group project, I felt I learned and practiced how to ask for support from others and delegate responsibility effectively. I did not find much benefit in reporting the work online through the blog - other than the TA’s response in the form of evaluation of our work, I didn’t feel this was something that was read. This made it difficult to be excited about writing the blog. I was excited, however, to share and update on our progress as a group in our meetings with community partners, when we were able to update them in person, exchange ideas, and have constructive discussion. The infographic presentation and viewing was also another such opportunity when I was excited to share what we have been up to.

Student 3:

Prior to taking this course and participating in this CBEL project, I was not excited to do it because I had bad experiences with previous group projects. However, after discovering that there was a project based in the community I grew up in, I gained interest and felt a strong need to make this project go well. In the beginning it was confusing because my group members and I were all unsure about what to do, but the project ended up going smoothly because of my enthusiastic and easygoing group members as well as unconditional support from our community partners, TAs and instructor. My group members were all great to work with as we never had to worry about who had to do what and the tasks were all split evenly.

The flexible learning days were really helpful because it gave us time to meet up and discuss the project with our community partners outside of school. I thought the blog was a neat way of keeping track of what we were doing as a group, but I thought it was too structured and I still don't understand the point of adding scholarly sources into it. I also agree with Student 2 - we put a lot of effort into writing the group blogs but I don't think it is going to be read other than by the TAs and community partners. Aside from the group blogs, I think this whole project has been a positive and rewarding experience.

Student 4:

With this project I was excited to be working in an area that was meaningful to me, this helped give me motivation and a desire to engage in our project. Our group as a whole is very strong and includes individuals that are hard working and strive for the best. In past experiences group projects had been a struggle but having a good team and having class time to meet helped make the project flow smoothly. Everyone in the group pulled their weight and there was never any expression of someone feeling overworked. As I mentioned having class time to regroup as a team really helped our group morale and helped our project stay focused. The flexible learning days were extraordinarily helpful. This time was always well used to delegate tasks and brainstorm for the upcoming projects. I felt that this flexible learning time accomplished much more than was accomplished in our tutorial, as the time was specific to our project. The group blogs were not a highlight of this project, I did not feel connected to them. I felt much like student 2 and 3 in that the blog was a lot of effort and that no one else would be reading them. Overall I do understand their value, but it lacks the incentive that a blog usually provides. This project has been both insightful and enjoyable overall. Thanks to my group, this project was smooth and I gained knowledge and experience through the assignments that I am grateful for.

Student 5:

Studying food but in a more science based background I mostly learn the science behind food and how our body uses its nutrients for biochemical processes, but being a part of this project it really changed my perspective from understanding the small scope of food to the large masses of how food can affect communities. The Hasting Sunrise community focus groups allowed me to hear the dialogue that individuals have based on food, and how community members want to create better programs to help reduce food insecurity. Throughout the course of the term I felt like I was always learning something new about food, and I really enjoyed that aspect of it. Even though at times it felt like there was no clear picture what our project was

about my group members were always there to help explain what was going on, and I greatly appreciated that. I really enjoyed working my group because it was a positive environment; everyone always helped each other out, and it was a fun experience. Overall, this group project helped me learn more about myself and most importantly helped me appreciate food in a different perspective.

Student 6:

When LFS 350 first began in January I was admittedly not excited as it seemed like such a large undertaking and as a nutritional sciences student, it seemed far removed and unrelated from the science-based courses that I had become accustomed to. Working within the Hastings-Sunrise community has widened my perspective on why people actually study food and nutrition; it is not solely about memorizing metabolic processes and nutrition facts. The real importance of studying comes with how that knowledge is applied, and this project made me realize how thankful I am that the FNH program includes a broader range of classes than ones that are just STEM field based. Working with this group and with our community partners has been a pleasure and has made me excited to participate in similar work in the future, especially since our group delegated tasks and worked very efficiently together.

I found that the required assignments were effective at helping us stay focused in general, although, I didn't find much value in the group blogs as they were often tedious and we knew that it was most likely not being viewed by anyone except those evaluating us (in which case there were probably simpler ways of relaying how are project was coming along.) I really enjoyed working with the Piktochart tool, and I believe that being able to create an infographic is a very applicable skill that I am excited to gain.

Appendix

1 . Food Circle Feedback Session January 26th, Hastings Sunrise Community Centre



2. Revised Focus Group Questionnaire

1. What does a (typical/nutritious) meal look like to you?
2. What food resources are you aware of?
 - a. Which resources do you use?
 - b. Which resources are you aware of but don't use? Why don't you use them?
3. What kind of barrier/challenges do you face in accessing food?
4. Do you eat local food? Do you grow any food?
 - c. If not, would you like to grow food?
 - d. What are the barriers that you face in growing your own food?
5. How do you find the strength to ask for support?

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