

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Baseline Report

November 2011



Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Acknowledgments

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Contributing Organizations

Ain Dah Yung Center
Casa de Esperanza
Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center
Catholic Charities Family Service Center
Emergency Foodshelf Network
Face to Face/Safe Zone
Greater Twin Cities United Way
Loaves and Fishes
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Missions, Inc./Hart House
Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health
Salvation Army East Side
Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel
Side by Side Associates
The Family Place
Union Gospel Mission
West Side Health Care Services/Health Care for the Homeless
Women's Advocates
Women of Nations/Eagles Nest Shelter

About the Author

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Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Contributing Organizations



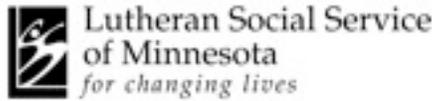
CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Dorothy Day Center



CATHOLIC CHARITIES
Family Service Center



Strengthening American Indian Youth and Families



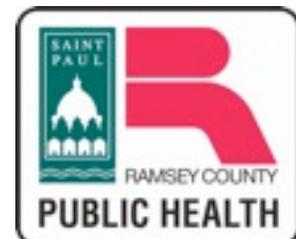
Greater Twin Cities
United Way



Health Care for the Homeless



Innovative. Nutritious. Local.



Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

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Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Executive Summary

Hunger relief organizations are given a mission that might sound impossible: Feed an ever-increasing number of clients. Do that with limited existing resources. And while doing so, ensure the nutrition of meals, consider cultural appropriateness, manage volunteers and staff, and provide additional social services to meet the immediate and long-term needs of clients.



Yet, meal programs and shelters in Ramsey County are trying to do just that. Working independently and with the support of the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition, meal programs and shelters have been making small, steady steps toward improving the nutritional quality of the meals they serve. Some of those steps include creative sourcing, nutrition training of volunteers, rotating menus, and client cooking.

These small steps forward have not been without occasional steps backward, including challenges around a high demand for services, balancing nutrition with cost, and serving a population in crisis. This report presents the current state of meal programs and shelters in Ramsey County, collected through a series of key informant interviews with organizational leaders. Through collecting baseline information from 19 meal programs sites [14 organizations], this report presents current practices and recommendations for future priorities for the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition.

Overview

Meal programs throughout Ramsey County serve an estimated 1,066,000 meals per year. Eligibility requirements for meal programs vary, though the majority of sites are open only to program participants or residents [11]. Five sites are open to all walk-in clients, and three sites are limited to a specific gender or age group. With one exception, meal programs that are restricted to residents or program participants are also those that provide their clients with three meals a day, seven days a week. Meal programs that are open to all are also those with more limited services, whether one meal or two meals a day.

Meal programs and shelters are specifically dedicated to serve people in crisis, though their clients' crisis situation and increasing demand for services are seen as a barrier to nutritional education. The majority of meal programs [10] identified African American clients as the largest population group they serve. Three meal programs identified Caucasian clients as the largest population group they serve. Three additional sites focus their services on Native American clients [2] or Latino clients [1].

Sourcing

Organizations employ various food sourcing strategies to make their meals cost-effective. For the most part, meal programs are heavily reliant on Second Harvest Heartland, a large food bank. Meal program sites purchase food from five different distributors and six sites do not use a distributor at all. Reliance on donations and the resources of food banks affects organizations' ability to plan meals ahead of time. Meal programs also reported experiencing sourcing issues, including availability of healthy options, quantity issues, and inconsistency of products. Almost 60% of meal programs use volunteers to prepare at least one meal per week, and there is a significant lack of information about the sources that volunteers use to purchase food.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Executive Summary

Meal Preparation and Planning

When planning meals, organizational staff consider multiple priorities, including cost, ease of preparation, client satisfaction, nutrition, and cultural relevance.

Cost: Especially in a period of increasing demand for services, increasing food costs and limited financial resources, cost is the primary concern for many organizations.

Ease of Preparation: Cost considerations and ease of preparation are closely linked, because they both are impacted by the amount of staff, volunteer or client time available and necessary for meal preparation. Small organizations may not have dedicated kitchen staff to prepare meals.

Client Satisfaction: Client satisfaction is a priority for many meal programs and it is also one of the measures for which they get immediate and constant feedback. Though organizations want clients to be satisfied, clients are a diverse and constantly changing group, with different tastes, preferences and levels of interest in healthy foods.

Nutrition: Organizations have been making small changes to improve the nutritional quality of the meals they serve, some of which have been motivated by federal reimbursement program requirements. Broadly, these changes involve decreasing sodium, fat, or sugar - or - increasing fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains.

Cultural Relevance: For the majority of meal programs, cultural relevance is not a regular consideration of their meal program. Organizations make occasional ethnic meals and make moderate accommodations for clients with religious food restrictions.

Recommendations

◆ Engage in organization-based goal setting to commit to healthy changes

A coalition-led goal setting session would be a structured way to share strategies for improving the nutrition of meals. By setting SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely] goals, coalition members will be able to support each other in their organization-specific goals, and realize measurable impact in a short time frame.

◆ Consolidate purchasing for cost savings based on collective purchasing power

Meal program sites currently purchase food from five different distributors. A group purchasing agreement could leverage the coalition's bulk buying power into significant cost savings for organizations.

◆ Make nutrition the healthy default, not just the healthy choice

Organizations commonly describe healthy foods as an alternative to be served alongside regular menu items, but not often as something to be integrated into regular menu items. However, by bringing nutrition into existing meal components, organizations can better improve the health of their clients and maintain client satisfaction.

◆ Utilize coalition members and community resources

Coalition members should continue to use other members as resources in considering nutritional changes.



Executive Summary

◆ Implement nutrition training for all who prepare meals

Many organizations are interested or engaging in volunteer training around nutrition. Staff provide a majority of meals in most sites and should also be trained on nutritious meal planning and preparation. The coalition should invest time in creating this training, and continue to build a toolkit for menu planning and preparation to guide staff and volunteers.

◆ Increase participation in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Over half of the meal programs that are eligible for CACFP do not participate in the reimbursement program. The program provides federal dollars to off-set the cost of meals, and participating organizations have used CACFP guidelines to institute nutritional improvements.

◆ Set standards for accepted donations

Many meal programs rely heavily on donations as a way to stretch food dollars. However, often times donated items are high in fat, sugar and of low nutritional value. Developing and implementing a unified set of standards that all meal programs in Ramsey County adopt will help to ensure consistency in messaging and improve nutritional quality of meals and snacks in all programs who utilize donations.

◆ Connect with larger initiatives

The recommendations provided here will go a long way to improving nutritional quality of meals for meal programs in Ramsey County. However, as part of the RC HMC's mission is to develop a replicable model for healthy, cost-effective and culturally responsive meals, the RC HMC should connect with larger initiatives to both share their tools and strategies and expand the scope of their impact.

◆ **Engage in organization-based goal setting to commit to healthy changes**

◆ **Make nutrition the healthy default, not just the healthy choice**

◆ **Utilize coalition members and community resources**

◆ **Consolidate purchasing for cost savings based on collective power**

◆ **Implement routine nutrition training for all who prepare meals**

◆ **Increase participation in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

◆ **Set standards for accepted donations**

◆ **Connect with larger initiatives**

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Background

Hunger and Homelessness

Food is food, calories are calories. Or so goes the traditional mindset in fighting hunger, though that mindset may be changing. Hunger is more complex than simply not meeting caloric needs. It also includes meeting the basic nutrient requirements that individuals need to be healthy [Nord, 2010]. Fighting hunger, then, requires more than just calories.

In 2009, approximately 49 million Americans were hungry or at risk for being hungry [Associated Press, 2009]. A greater percentage of Americans than ever - 14.7% of households - live with food insecurity. Food insecurity can also be seen in the increase in the use of emergency food assistance programs, including meal programs and food shelves, which provided food for 5.6 million households in 2009. Households most at risk for being hungry are those with children and a single head of household; those with incomes below the poverty threshold; and those in an urban environment [Nord, 2010].

Research has indicated substantial evidence that food insecurity and obesity co-exist, within individuals and demographic groups. The “hunger-obesity paradox” indicates that while it may seem counter-intuitive, hunger can occur with over-nutrition, and obesity can occur with malnutrition. The authors of a systemic review around this paradox conclude that while additional research is necessary, “it is critical that future efforts to eliminate hunger consider opportunities to promote healthy food choices and physical activity” [Larson & Story, 2011].

In Minnesota, the number of homeless people has risen sharply in recent years, after a period of leveling off. A statewide survey reports that on any given night, there are an estimated 13,100 people who are homeless. Youth make up a growing percentage of the homeless population. There are an estimated 1,268 youth who are homeless on any given night, which represent a 46% increase in the three years between surveys. African Americans and Native Americans are significantly over-represented among the homeless in Minnesota. Though African-Americans and African-born people make up just 4% of Minnesota’s population, they make up 41% of Minnesota’s homeless population [Wilder, 2010].

Three fourths [74%] of homeless adults in Minnesota reported experiencing one of three major health issues, whether chronic health problem, substance abuse, or mental illness. Almost half [46%] of homeless adults reported experiencing at least one chronic health problem. This population is at significant risk for diet-related chronic disease, such as high blood pressure [24%], diabetes [8%], or chronic heart or circulatory problems [8%] [Wilder, 2010]. A survey of homeless adults in Ramsey County [n=30] found even higher self-reported rates of chronic disease. Half of those surveyed reported being obese or overweight, and nearly a third reported having diabetes [Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, 2010].

Ramsey County Population

Ramsey County is the most densely populated and racially diverse county in Minnesota. The population of Ramsey County, Minnesota is 506,278 according to the U.S. Census Bureau [2009]. The racial makeup of Ramsey County is as follows: 76.1% White, 9.0% African American, 0.6% American Indian, 9.6% Asian, and 6.3% Latino. Ramsey County is home to a large population of immigrants, with 53% of Minnesota refugees settling in Ramsey County, principally Hmong refugees from Laos and Thailand, East African refugees from Somalia, and Karen refugees from Burma [Minnesota Department of Health, 2009].

Minnesota as a state consistently ranks in the top 10 nationally in measures of health, physical activity and education. However, the population of Ramsey County exhibits high poverty rates, education gaps, and health disparities both county-wide and within specific ethnic and cultural communities when compared with national rates [U.S. Census Bureau, 2000].

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition



The leading causes of death in Ramsey County are cancer, heart disease, and stroke [Minnesota Department of Health, 2011]. In Ramsey County, African Americans have the highest mortality rates across all three leading causes of death. Adults in Ramsey County are at significant risk for chronic disease, as 37.3% of adults in Ramsey County are overweight, 24.5% are obese and 16.8% smoke tobacco.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Established in January, 2011, the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition [RCHMC] represents free meal programs and shelters in Ramsey County. Its mission is to develop and implement practices that enable Ramsey County shelters and meal programs to provide healthy, culturally responsive, and cost-effective meals. Convened by Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, through support from the Statewide Health Improvement Program [SHIP], the RCHMC is focused on nutrition in order to produce changes for better health for the clients it serves.

Its vision is to create an effective, feasible, and replicable model for providing healthy, culturally appropriate and cost-effective meals for shelters and meal programs in Ramsey County, by 2015. This model will employ a new collaborative approach to distribution, menu development, volunteer training, food sourcing, and client health, resulting in a healthier community.

A meal program...

is a community or residential dining program that provides an on-site free, nutritious meal at least once a month to those in need

- Adopted by the RCHMC on May 12, 2011

Report Methodology

The goal of this study was to interview staff with all meal programs in Ramsey County, based on the above definition adopted by the RCHMC. Meal program sites were identified through information provided by the Greater Twin Cities United Way and Second Harvest Heartland. In addition, all interviewees were asked about other meal programs in Ramsey County, and an additional program site was added to the list as a result. However, the difficulty of identifying all places that serve on-site meals is a limitation of the study. After the study was complete, researchers identified an additional meal program at Merrick Community Services.

Researchers conducted 14 key informant interviews [13 in June and one in September, 2011] in order to gather information about meal programs in Ramsey County. These interviews represented 79% of identified meal program sites in Ramsey County [with 5 program sites unable to complete the interview process]. The completed interviews represented 19 meal program sites operated by 12 organizations. The research team included representatives from the RCHMC baseline/operations workgroup, Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, Side by Side Associates, and the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.

The interview protocol was developed by a coalition working group in conjunction with Lindsey Hoeft at Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health and Marijo Wunderlich, a staff evaluator at Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health [see Appendix A]. Members of the working group and staff, consultants, and interns at Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health acted as interviewer/researchers. When possible, two researchers co-conducted the interview, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded with N-Vivo 9, using a quasi-inductive approach, allowing the data to drive the codes, categories, and themes; while recognizing that the interview guide influences the themes that emerge. One quarter [28%] of interviews were double-coded and analyzed for inter-coder reliability [.709 Kappa, 99.47% agreement].

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Overview

A variety of organizations in Ramsey County operate meal programs - traditional shelters, community meal programs, and social service agencies. Meal programs throughout Ramsey County serve an estimated 1,066,000 meals a year. This number was calculated based on organizations' self-report, either of the number of clients that usually attend meals or the number of clients for which they prepare. Number of meals served often fluctuate within the month and within the year. Almost all programs reported higher numbers toward the end of the month, when clients' may have used up their food benefits. Programs that provide meals to children reported lower meal numbers overall during the school year, since children eat lunch, and sometimes breakfast, at school.

Organizations provide as few as four meals a week to as many as three meals and snacks each day, seven days a week. The majority of sites provide lunch [84%] or dinner [84%], and slightly fewer sites provide breakfast [74%]. Of the organizations surveyed, 63% provide three meals a day, seven days a week. Organizations tend to provide fewer meals on weekends [68% provide at least one weekend meal; conversely, a third do not provide any meals on the weekend]. Especially in downtown St. Paul, organizations have coordinated services to minimize redundancy and provide for shared clients. For example, Salvation Army Citadel serves breakfast during the weekdays, and less than a mile away, Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center [in conjunction with Loaves and Fishes volunteer groups] serves lunch and dinner seven days a week, and breakfast on the weekends.

Eligibility requirements for meal programs vary. Five sites are open to all walk-in clients, three sites are limited to a specific gender or age group, and the majority of sites [11] are open only to program participants or residents. The level of operation often coincides with eligibility measures. That is, with one exception, meal programs that are restricted to residents or program participants are also those that provide their clients with three meals a day, seven days a week. Meal programs that are open to all are also those with more limited services, whether one meal or two meals a day [Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center is a partial exception to that rule. It offers three meals a day, but only offers weekday breakfast to its 40 clients at its women shelter and for residents at another Catholic Charities program site. The majority of clients are able to access two meals a day during the week, and three meals a day on weekends.]

The majority of meal programs [10] identified African American clients as the largest population group they serve. Three meal programs identified Caucasian clients as the largest population group they serve. Three additional sites focus their services on Native American clients [2] or Latino clients [1].

RC HMC Member Organizations

Ain Dah Yung Center
Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center
Catholic Charities Family Service Center
Emergency Foodshelf Network
Greater Twin Cities United Way
Loaves & Fishes of Minnesota
The Family Place
The Salvation Army
Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health
Union Gospel Mission
West Side Community Health Services/
Health Care for the Homeless
Women's Advocates

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition



Our Clients Live and Exist in Crisis

Meal programs and shelters are specifically designed to serve people in crisis. Their clients may be families who are recently homeless, women or children who have been abused, or teenagers who have left home. When clients are trying to fill immediate, basic needs like shelter, they may not have energy for much else.

“I think the first thing they think about the most is getting income, getting a place to stay...Food is probably the last [thing they think about].” - Women’s Advocates

In addition to a short client length of stay, clients’ crisis situation is seen as a barrier to prevention or nutritional education.

“Our kids are here for such a short period of time, and secondly, they’re in crisis...We don’t want to be sitting around talking to them about the importance of learning about diabetes when they’ve just been taken from their mother.” - Ain Dah Yung Center

Crisis can also negatively affect the way that clients interact with food, turning to comfort foods which may be less healthy.

“We get residents who come in who are stressed and they want to feed that stress. So I tell them, guys, as hard as it is and as much as I want to see you satisfied, I also want to see you healthy. I don’t want to see you eat bags of chips that have no nutritional value, just to satisfy the moment. Some of it is the periods we’re in in our lives. I tell them, you’re not going to be here forever. You’re feeling this way today but you won’t be here forever.” - Women’s Advocates

Organizations also see the potential for meal programs to relieve some of their clients’ stress, and be a place of respite.

“They have all these things going on, and this is the one time when they can come in and just enjoy something for half an hour and not have to worry about the other stuff.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

Demand for Services

Many organizations spoke of an increased demand for services, and the pressure to continue to provide the same level of service to clients. In the last year, Catholic Charities Family Service Center, a shelter for families who are homeless, has added 10 more beds to its facility in Maplewood. It now has room for 65 family members at a time, and is almost always at capacity.

At Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center, hundreds of people come in its doors each day. The facility [and its very limited bathrooms and showers], staff, volunteers, and clients are pushed to their capacity.

“It’s like a tsunami. You know it’s coming, you see it’s coming, and it’s a slow overwhelming component. You can see it roll in and it just kind of overwhelms whatever’s in its path. And when we’re sleeping 240 people here at night, the facility simply cannot handle that.” - Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

A constant and increasing demand for services can be a barrier to change. This stress affects an organization’s programmatic services, and it permeates through to an organization’s approach to their meal program.

“Our clients live and exist in crisis. You cannot provide service to folks who are in crisis without having some of that crisis infect how you operate. So inevitably, things occur that get in the way of making change. How do we find a better option?” - Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center

Sourcing

Meal programs utilize a range of vendors to source their food, from distributors to food banks, and from grocery stores to discount stores. In addition, many meal programs rely significantly on donations, such as those from restaurants and grocery stores. For the most part, meal programs are heavily reliant on Second Harvest Heartland, a large food bank. Seven sites reported that they use Second Harvest Heartland as their main source of food, and another six sites use Second Harvest Heartland as a partial source for food [See Figure 1]. At Second Harvest Heartland, organizations can order online or shop in person for discounted and free food, such as TEFAP [The Emergency Food Assistance Program] products. Two program sites reported using Emergency Food Network [EFN], a food bank, as a partial source for food.

“We’ve got to change the stigma of shelter food from ‘you get what you get’ to ‘we can provide healthier meals and it’s not going to cost us more.’”
- Union Gospel Mission

Meal program sites purchase food from five different distributors and six sites do not use a distributor at all [Figure 2]. Use of food distributors is generally distributed between Reinhart,

Figure 1: **Food Banks Used by Ramsey County Meal Programs**

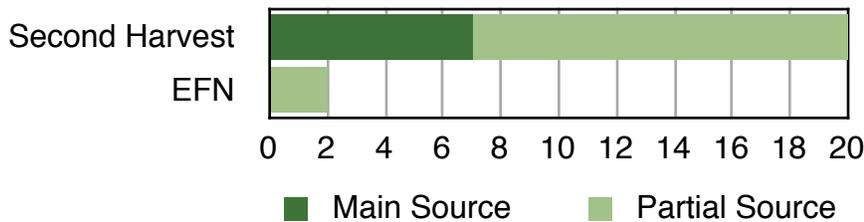
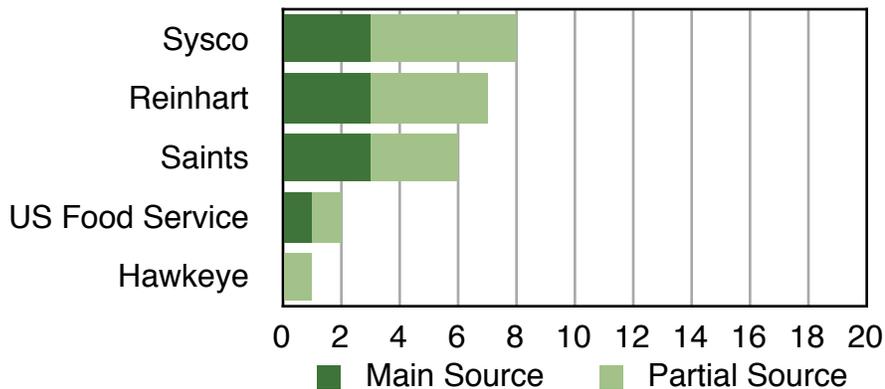


Figure 2: **Distributors Used by Ramsey County Meal Programs**



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Saints, and Sysco - three program sites use each as their main source of food. Two additional sites use Sysco and one site uses Reinhart as a partial source of food. One site uses US Food Service as a main source, and one site uses Hawkeye as a partial source.

Meal programs report using grocery stores and discount warehouses to supplement the food they order from their distributor and food bank source [Figure 3]. Some sites rely heavily on grocers for their food supply. Two sites consistently use Cub or Rainbow as the primary source of their food. Reasons for using these sources include needing a small quantity, needing something immediately, and proximity to location. Organizations employ various sourcing strategies to minimize overall costs. The most common strategy is to cook with what is recently donated to the program or what is available at food banks. Depending on the organization, donations may make up a significant portion of their menu. For example, Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel receives food donations from 54 different sources, and they have dedicated staff to pick up the donations for its meal program and on-site food shelf. Both Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel and Eastside receive significant donations from Saint Paul Public Schools during the school year.

Other organizations may receive donations from grocery stores or restaurants, though the most often donated items are bread, pastries, and desserts. Since meal programs depend on donations, they felt obligated to serve the products - regardless of nutritional value - so as not to let them go to waste. At Safe Zone, a drop-in center for teens who are homeless, one of the hot meals each day is donated from the restaurant LeeAnn Chin's, for example, sweet and sour fried chicken, rice, and egg rolls.

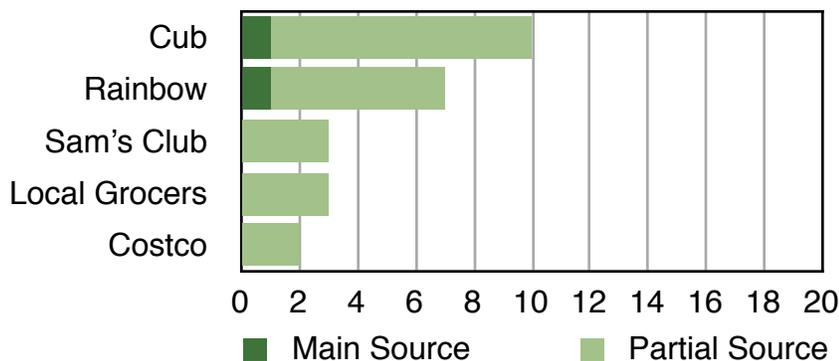
“It isn’t the healthiest, but it’s free.” - Safe Zone

Other cost-effective sourcing strategies include frequent price comparisons between their distributor and Second Harvest Heartland, buying generic brands, and stocking up on food when it is available at Second Harvest Heartland.

“I have that Depression mentality. Like if I see something, I’ve got to get it because I don’t know if I’m going to get it again.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

Organizations frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the availability of healthy options at their current distributor and/or Second Harvest Heartland. For example, Ain Dah Yung Center is changing its program to meet Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements, and

Figure 3: **Grocery/Warehouses Used by Ramsey County Meal Programs**



Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

is struggling to find reimbursable options [such as 100% fruit juice] or healthier options [such as ground turkey] at its current distributor, Saints.

“I feel somewhat handcuffed with the variety and the resources for healthy choices...I try to order healthy things from Saints but Saints doesn't maybe offer the healthiest stuff, and not a lot of [variety]. That's a problem for us.” - Ain Dah Yung Center

While organizations often rely on Second Harvest Heartland to guide their menu planning and to help them cut costs, they often complained of issues of inconsistency and quantity. Organizations also felt there is a lack of healthy options at Second Harvest Heartland, expressing that while they could rely on access to [often unhealthy] snacks, they could not rely on fruits and vegetables.

Both small and large organizations struggled with quantity issues, though in opposite ways. Small organizations do not use food quickly enough or have enough storage space to take advantage of many of the products [distributed in cases or industrial cans] at Second Harvest Heartland. Large organizations must ensure that they have enough quantity of a particular product to serve a meal to all their clients.

No organizations are locked into purchasing contracts, although they have informal agreements about the minimum number of cases required for a delivery. Few organizations had considered changing their distributor in order to negotiate a better price agreement, perhaps because they had minimal complaints and a quality service representative. However, this attitude may be changing as organizations share information with each other about distributors. The Family Place, for example, is now considering a distributor change because another distributor appeared to be more amenable to smaller quantity orders of fruits and vegetables.

PROMISING PRACTICE: CREATIVE SOURCING

Catholic Charities Family Service Center in Maplewood used the website Ampleharvest.org to connect with a local church that raised a “giving garden” to grow fresh, local vegetables for the center. Though this first summer's harvest was small and inconsistent from week to week, it helped supplement fresh vegetables for the shelter.

Women of Nations, a domestic abuse shelter for Native American women and children, has a partnership with Boston Scientific, whose staff delivers produce from their on-site garden. During the growing season, Women of Nations is able to source a significant percentage of their produce from Boston Scientific.

Several meal programs and shelters have experimented with a community supported agriculture [CSA] share, a

weekly or bi-weekly delivery of produce from a local farm. Programs commonly received the CSA share as a one-time gift from a donor [and one reported that when the farm found out about the gift, the farm contributed a second share]. Shares include a mix of local vegetables and fruit, and often present a good creative challenge for the organization's cooks.

“Although it's challenging to teach teenagers to eat kohlrabi and some of the other vegetables that came in...it was really nice to be able to have that there.”
- Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Although programs expressed interest in continuing to receive a CSA share, they are not able to afford it without specific donor assistance.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition



“When we look at our food, it’s been done within our own [walls]. No one was saying this is good or not good or there’s more efficient ways of serving the food, or different vendors to look at. We just went along, doing what we did. When I went to the coalition meeting, [I saw] there’s another way of looking at things.” - The Family Place

Almost 60% of meal programs use volunteers to prepare at least one meal, and volunteer groups often source the meals they prepare. There is a significant lack of information about the sources that volunteers use to purchase their food. Many programs did not know where volunteer groups bought their food. Loaves and Fishes is entirely reliant on volunteers, and its groups purchase food at a variety of sources. About 50% of Loaves and Fishes volunteer teams use Saints food service, and about 15% of teams use Second Harvest Heartland. Teams buy food from grocery stores and have also set up their own donations through local businesses.

At sites that use volunteers, volunteer groups are independently organized and may only volunteer once a month. Volunteer groups bear increased food costs because they buy limited amounts at grocery stores, and increased time because they must deliver their own food. In addition, they may lack storage at the meal program site.

Separately, volunteer groups have limited purchasing power, but collectively they make an impact. At Loaves and Fishes, volunteer groups contribute \$700,000 worth of food donations a year. Loaves and Fishes partnered with the Emergency Foodshelf Network [EFN] in a pilot project to develop a set menu and delivery system - volunteers would pick one of several nutritional menus, and the food for that menu would be delivered to the site by EFN. Volunteer groups would pay EFN \$1.25 per meal.

“Say you were a volunteer, you would show up and all the food would be there, the recipe would be there, and you would just make it and go, and write a check...They thought it was so great. It was great.” - Loaves and Fishes

Though Loaves and Fishes volunteers loved the arrangement, ultimately the program was not financially feasible for EFN to provide these services.

Meal Planning and Preparation

Meal programs in Ramsey County typically rely on a combination of staff and volunteers to prepare meals. Almost 80% of program sites use staff to prepare [at least one] meal. Staff are solely responsible for meal preparation at four program sites in Ramsey County.

Ramsey County meal programs serve an estimated...

3,278 meals a day
20,500 meals a week
273,416 breakfasts a year
411,528 lunches a year
381,056 dinners a year
1,066,000 meals a year

Almost 60% of meal programs use volunteers to prepare at least one meal. Volunteers are the sole source of meal preparation at two sites. In addition, about a quarter of program sites [26.3%] ask clients to help staff prepare the meals. Clients independently prepare meals, without staff assistance, at two sites in Ramsey County. When planning meals, organizational staff consider multiple priorities, including cost, ease of preparation, client satisfaction, and nutrition.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Cost

Meal planning often centers around cost-effectiveness, especially in a period of increasing demand for services, increasing food costs, and limited resources. Cost is the primary concern for many organizations:

“First, you’ve got to go with the cost”

“I would say it’s mostly a budget issue”

“Budget is really our biggest issue”

“My job is to serve as many meals as possible for as low cost as possible”

- Various meal programs

Cost is seen as a potential barrier for making nutritional changes to a menu. Meals at Loaves and Fishes sites are prepared and purchased entirely by volunteers. Though nutrition is a priority for the organization, it struggles to ask its volunteer groups to pay more when they already provide so much.

“Food is getting more expensive and we’re pushing on them to serve healthier food...To serve a large group of people, they usually add more noodles or rice.”

Figure 4: **Amount Spent Per Meal at Ramsey County Meal Programs**

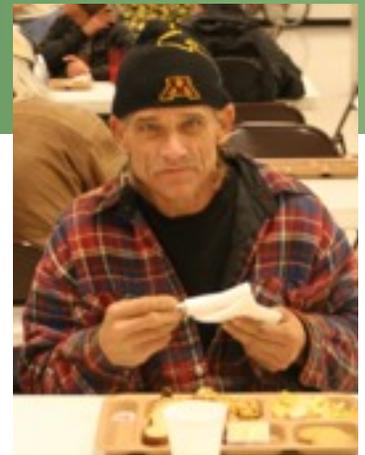


So when you break it down to the serving size, the actual amount of protein in a serving size is small. It’s easy to say well, why don’t you cut your rice in half and double your ground turkey? Well, that doubles your price!” - Loaves and Fishes

Cost can come into conflict with nutritional goals, although not always. Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, which operates meal programs at a shelter for homeless youth and a transitional housing program for young moms, has formal and informal ways of teaching youth about a healthy lifestyle on a shoestring budget.

“We’re trying to model in our food program to the young people, that when you have a budget, you can still eat healthier and you know, it’s actually cheaper to buy groceries and cook than it is to go to McDonald’s four times a week.”
- Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition



Ease of Preparation

Cost considerations and ease of preparation are closely linked, because they both affect the amount of staff time available and necessary for meal preparation. Making menu items from scratch can save money in sourcing but cost money in labor. Using processed food items can save money in labor but cost money in sourcing.

“I spend a lot of time thinking about how to do things inexpensively, too. And making a lot of stuff from scratch really [helps] the cost.” - Hart House

“If you’re going to have more fruits and vegetables, sometimes, the prep takes longer. And if you don’t have a volunteer, you have to wash those fresh fruits, you have to wash those fresh vegetables, you have to chop them. And that part takes a long time.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

“We want to move away from what’s ‘easy’ to cook. That’s why we’re in the predicament we are now.” - Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center

Small organizations may not have dedicated kitchen staff to prepare meals. Support staff play double duty at meal time, and have to fit in meal preparation around their other responsibilities.

“If we have 85 young people down here we don’t have a lot of time to be preparing meals.” - Safe Zone

PROMISING PRACTICE: ROTATING MENU

Rotating menus are being used by an increasing number of meal programs. Whether one-, two-, or four-week menus, rotating menus can help meal programs become more consistent and efficient. They can also be part of a strategy to improve nutrition.

Ain Dah Yung Center’s emergency shelter for youth recently implemented a one-week rotating menu. Not only has it brought consistency to the meal program, Emergency Shelter Director Jason Smith says it’s also brought down the cost of the meal program. “We got it down to a weekly rotating schedule and tied that to our ordering and made sure we were efficient with what we were ordering. It’s really improved and it’s helped us save some money too. And it’s more nutritious and stable – because

children in crisis need structure and consistent environment, and that includes meals, too.” The rotating menu allows for clients - and meal program staff - to plan ahead.

The Family Place, a day shelter for families who are homeless, decided to experiment with a two-week rotating menu. “We’re seeing how it works,” says Margaret Lovejoy, the executive director. “And after a month or so... We’ll sit down as a staff and see, how is this working?” Though mainly used by staff, the organization also hopes the rotating menu will be used by volunteer groups to prevent accidental meal repetition, which can occur when independent volunteer groups don’t communicate with each other.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Client Satisfaction

Client satisfaction is a priority for many meal programs, and it's also one of the measures for which they get immediate and constant feedback.

“Client satisfaction to me is first and foremost because we're here to serve them. And to meet their needs and try to do the best that we can, and fix things that they like, but also to provide them choices.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

Though organizations want clients to be satisfied, clients are a diverse and constantly changing group, with different tastes, preferences, and levels of interest in healthy foods.

“Even though it's healthy, I still want residents to enjoy it. But I know that I can't please 50 residents. If you cook it healthy - or not - you're still not going to please 50 people.” - Women's Advocates

Generally, organizations know that clients will be satisfied by comfort foods. Some commonly mentioned favorite foods include wings, ribs, hamburgers, pizza, tacos, and fried chicken. But clients also want healthy foods, and client surveys have proved false an assumption that clients don't want healthy items. In a recent Loaves and Fishes survey of its clients [n=321], the item most liked by clients was fresh fruit [72% across all sites], followed by fresh veggies [62% across all sites], and then hamburgers [60% across all sites][Loaves and Fishes, 2011].

Nutrition

Nutrition is commonly cited as a goal of organizations, and for some organizations, it is the foremost priority. However, cost, ease of preparation, and client satisfaction are often prioritized before nutrition.

Organizations have been making small changes to improve the nutritional quality of the meals they serve. Broadly, these changes involve decreasing sodium, fat, or sugar - or - increasing fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains. Specifically, a cost-effective change might be rinsing canned vegetables before serving to remove excess sodium, or baking chicken instead of frying it. A change might be mixing fresh fruits with canned fruits, serving whole wheat bread or pasta, or using half ground turkey and half ground beef in meals. A nutritional change might include restricting certain food items, such as desserts, a change which costs nothing.

“We don't buy chips, we don't buy pop...If the women want those kind of things, they have to purchase it with their own money, which a lot of them choose not to. We always have on hand fruits, vegetables, all different kinds of meats, all different kinds of dry foods. In my opinion, the women eat healthier.”
- Casa de Esperanza

“Ease people into things and as people gradually get used to eating healthier food then you can increase it, increase it, increase it. You can't go overnight to stir-fried tofu. You can't. But you start some place. You start where your clients are, and you move them gradually down a continuum to eating healthier.”

- Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

One of the most frequently mentioned strategies for improving nutrition is making healthier versions of current recipes. By making comfort foods healthier, organizations can respect clients' food preferences and clients' need for nutritious food.

“We always have to keep that balance of what is comfortable for the families to eat. They're going through a lot of stress as it is,

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

and if you introduce foods that are way outside their eating comfort level, it would not help the situation, it would cause more stress.” - The Family Place

“You have to think about who you’re serving, think of their lives. And I think when it comes to healthy choices, you need to prepare it in a way that’s going to be pleasing to them but maybe doesn’t appear healthy.”
- Catholic Charities Family Service Center



Some of those nutritional changes have been motivated by Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) reimbursement requirements [Figure 5]. For example, for Loaves and Fishes, instituting requirements set the stage for year-round changes to its program. In the process of preparing to meet CACFP requirements, Ain Dah Yung Center is working to make its meals more balanced. Similarly, Union Gospel Mission participates in SFSP at its summer camp, Union Gospel Hill Camp, and Loaves and Fishes participates in SFSP at locations outside Ramsey County.

When organizations describe good nutrition, it is as a balanced meal with all the food groups represented: protein, grain, fruits and vegetables, and dairy. Organizations describe healthy items as an option to be served alongside regular menu items, but not often as something to be integrated into regular menu items.

“We’re going to offer them the healthy alternatives and hopefully they’ll choose them.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

Organizations commonly describe nutrition as a choice that is left to clients, to reject unhealthy foods and eat healthy foods.

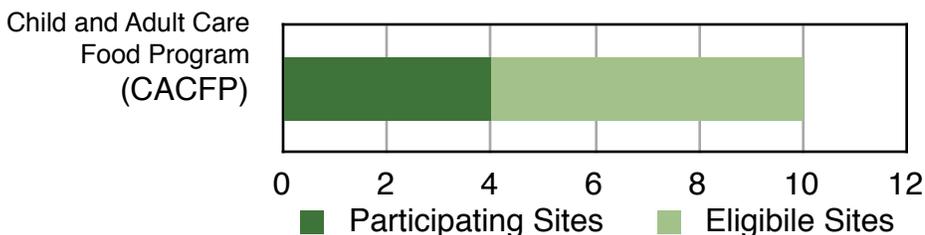
“[The sweets] are just way more than anyone should have. On the other hand, we’re not telling anybody they have to eat it. So it’s kind of people’s choice.” - Salvation Army East Side

“So we offer the nutritional meals, but it’s up to them to eat it or not. Can’t force people to eat.” - Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel

“You know, I think a lot of times, it’s the clients themselves that prevent them from getting really good nutrition. I can serve vegetables until the cows come home but if people don’t eat them, I can’t force them.” - Hart House

This view of nutrition as an alternative choice that clients should make for themselves neglects to take into account several important reasons why clients may not choose healthy foods. Clients may not have tried these foods before, and must overcome a resistance to new foods.

Figure 5: **Participation and Eligibility for Reimbursement Programs**



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“We ask people to try stuff. Just try it. Maybe you’ve never had it.” - Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

“I think for some reason, we think that because people are poor, they don’t want to eat healthy, and I don’t think that’s true.”

- Loaves and Fishes

“We had the salad on the table and a girl was sitting there. And her dad said, ‘I don’t eat that kind of food.’ And I said, ‘Just try a little bit.’ And of course, with ranch [dressing], you can eat anything. He tried it and said, ‘Well, it’s okay.’ To his daughter, I said, ‘Try this.’ I put a spinach leaf on her plate. She says, ‘That’s a leaf! Can I go outside and pick a leaf and eat it?’ And I said, ‘This is a special leaf, a spinach leaf.’ You know,

if a family has not been exposed to certain foods, they’re not going to insist that their children try it.” - The Family Place

Andréa Kish-Bailey of Loaves and Fishes tells the story of a volunteer group that brought in baskets of whole grain bread for a meal. “The guests were like, ‘Yuck!’” But now [the guests] like it!” The story illustrates to her that organizations should commit to offering healthy foods several

PROMISING PRACTICE: CLIENT MEAL PREPARATION

Although not possible at every location, client involvement in cooking can be a way to improve client satisfaction, assist staff, and engage clients around nutrition. At Women’s Advocates, a domestic abuse shelter for approximately 50 women and their children, clients are given the choice of cooking for themselves or eating the prepared meal during their stay. If women choose to cook, they come into the kitchen once a day to prepare dinner and lunch for the following day. Though few women choose this option, it may be appealing for families with specific diets, such as African immigrants. In the past, Women’s Advocates has experimented with different models of client involvement. Clients used to take turns being responsible for cooking for the rest of the shelter, but the organization felt that was an unnecessary stress that could be taken on by staff in order to let women focus on their next steps.

Clients independently prepare meals at two sites in Ramsey County, at Casa de

Esperanza and Ain Dah Yung Center’s Beverly A. Benjamin Youth Lodge. At both locations, staff assist in either shopping or planning for the meals. At Casa de Esperanza, a domestic abuse shelter for 12 women and their children, clients give staff a shopping list and are responsible for cooking for their families. However, women often cook together, sharing in the work and supporting each other. The organization has found that their clients generally prepare simple, healthy meals for their families, perhaps because many women are recent immigrants used to less processed foods. The organization has found that clients feel empowered by being able to cook for themselves.

“That’s one thing that we don’t ever get any complaints about is food. Usually, they say, ‘I’m so happy I got to cook here, to eat the foods I’m accustomed to, and my children don’t have to worry about...if they’re going to like it.’” - Casa de Esperanza

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times before they conclude that their clients don't like something, and that it may take multiple exposures before clients even try a new food.

Clients may be interested in healthy options in general, but may not be interested in the healthy options that are offered. The Loaves and Fishes client survey that found clients most liked foods were fresh fruit [72%] and fresh vegetables [62%] also found that canned fruits and vegetables did not score comparatively high [27% and 22%, respectively][2011].

“Volunteers say, ‘they just throw the [canned vegetables] away!’ And I say, ‘ Well, if you had canned green beans three times a week, wouldn't you just throw it away?’ Or canned corn. Of course, they'd rather have watermelon and mangoes and blueberries and strawberries, the same things we buy [for ourselves] when we go to the grocery store.” - Loaves and Fishes

Cultural Relevance

For the majority of meal programs, cultural relevance is not an integrated part of their meal program. Organizations try to make moderate accommodations for clients with religious food restrictions, for example, providing Muslims with an alternative if the main meal includes pork. Organizations may try to make a themed meal on occasion, such as fried chicken, greens, and macaroni and cheese to cater to an African American clientele.

Cultural relevance is a priority at meal programs that cater to specific cultural groups, such as Ain Dah Yung Center, Casa de Esperanza, and Women of Nations.

“One of our values at Casa is having culturally relevant services...We're all about asking women what they want, what they like. Women have said if they've stayed at a different shelter and then come here, “I don't like spaghetti, and my other option would be a turkey sandwich, and I don't like turkey sandwiches, either....

I know it's hard when you have a food service, you can't cook a bunch of different meals, you have to have a menu and stick to it...But if you are having a population that is not eating the kind of food that you like, find out what it is [they eat] and to serve an option that they would like to eat or want to eat.” - Casa de Esperanza

Training

Staff training around nutrition is currently limited to required food safety certification. Volunteer training is generally limited to basic orientation, though some meal programs have started moving beyond food safety to implement training around nutrition for clients and volunteers. Organizations have not yet developed kitchen staff training specifically around nutrition.

Volunteer training around nutrition can have a direct impact on the quality of meals served, as volunteers prepare meals at 60% of meal programs. Trainings must strike a balance between acknowledging the positive impact of volunteers - respecting their time and services - and pushing them to change.

“Even though they're providing a need, it can still be healthy...If we get [volunteers] coming in here, let's get them on board. We want them to be providing a meal that's similar to what we would provide.” - Women's Advocates

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Organizations hope that trainings will help volunteers re-imagine longstanding roles and recipes.

“You can bake fish, you don’t have to deep fat fry fish. Trying to make more of those options. But again, the volunteer will come in and say, ‘I always deep fat fry. It’s my job.’ ‘Well, I’m going to teach you a new job.’” - Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center

Catholic Charities Family Service Center recently partnered with West Side Community Health Services and its Health Care for the Homeless program to pilot client nutrition classes. The University of Minnesota Extension Service took over the required nutrition classes, which are taught twice a month. “Having the nutrition classes, that’s giving them more insight into what they should choose, and what’s good for them,” says JoAnn McCullough, kitchen coordinator at Catholic Charities Family Service Center.

Support for Healthy Changes

When considering making a change to its meal program, organizations consider many stakeholders - board members, management, clients, staff, and volunteers. In general, organizations saw their board of directors and management as supportive of but not especially interested in nutrition. At Women of Nations, its cook was planning to prepare one of his healthy dishes - chicken with mango salsa - for an upcoming management meeting.

PROMISING PRACTICE: VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Loaves and Fishes has a formalized volunteer nutrition orientation that all volunteer groups are required to take. It includes information about the food requirements of the summer food service and why a nutritious meal is important to [and for] clients. Many of the changes the orientation encourages are small - using frozen vegetables instead of canned, using canned fruit in fruit juice instead of syrup. Those small steps add up to improved nutrient value with “just a small cost increase,” says Andrea Kish-Bailey, program manager at Loaves and Fishes. “Maybe cut out the dessert and use that money to do some of these other changes. That’s really what it boils down to, just ideas on how you can incorporate them into your meal.”

Coalition members including Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health and West Side Community Health Services’ Health

Care for the Homeless have worked together to create a coalition-wide volunteer training workshop based off the Loaves and Fishes orientation. The workshop is designed for volunteers to network with other volunteers and learn why nutrition is important in the context of meal programs. The workshop lasts 60 - 90 minutes and includes an interactive session for volunteers to brainstorm ways to make their meals healthier. At a pilot at Catholic Charities Family Service Center, volunteers could try healthy versions of a traditional chicken hotdish and tacos [and take home the recipes].

“You can’t just say, ‘Don’t use cream of chicken soup.’ You need to give them a reason why. And then, they’re more open. That doesn’t mean they’ll change. But it’s planting the seed.” - Catholic Charities Family Service Center

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Organizations generally see client support for nutritious meals as varied and unpredictable.

“I would say it’s as varied as the clients. I would say that there’s some clients that desperately want something healthy. And I think there’s some clients that would scoff at what would be healthy options.”
- Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center

However, client surveys have shown that clients are interested in healthier meals. A survey [n=32] of attendees at the 2010 Project Homeless Connect resource fair found that 93% supported more fruits and vegetables being served at meal programs. A majority were supportive of more salads [83%], more whole grains [80%], less fat [70%] and less fried foods [57%] [Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, 2010] . Though this survey is limited in its sample size, it reinforces the findings from other surveys [Loaves and Fishes, 2011] that show overwhelming support for healthy meals.

While client satisfaction is an important priority for meal programs, clients turn over and may only be with a meal program for a short period of time. Staff and volunteers, however, may have been with a meal program for years, even decades - and they may have been making the same meals, the same way, for the entire time. Their resistance or support is essential to a meal program’s success in making nutritional changes. Organizations generally felt that staff were supportive of nutritional changes. At Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, staff and clients prepare meals together and eat together.

“I don’t allow my staff to bring in their own food and eat it in front of clients. We will eat it with them, because we’re not better than them. I had that happen in the past. Someone said, ‘I’m not eating the casserole the church dropped off.’ I’m like, ‘Well, if you’re not going to eat it, then why would we ask the kids to eat this?’” - Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

“I know sometimes they’re so used to doing things a certain way, it’s hard. It’s just pulling against the grain. But we’re going to do it because it’s something that’s needed to be done. I told them, we’re going to do this regardless, so come on board, and let’s have the right attitude about it.” - Women’s Advocates

At Women’s Advocates, a recent emphasis on nutrition and health has resulted in staff losing weight themselves.

“We’re trying to be a healthy shelter together, not just residents but staff as well. We want to practice what we preach.” - Women’s Advocates

In order for stakeholders to give their energy and support to changes [whether nutritional or otherwise], they must be included in the process. And for all stakeholders, their support for healthy options may not always match their actions or choices. For example, clients may ask for fresh fruits and vegetables but fall back on unhealthy eating habits when in crisis. Volunteers may prepare a special salad to serve on the side but also regularly bring a dessert to treat clients. Nutritional changes may require cultural shifts within organizations, which can only be sustained by involving stakeholders at each small step.

Recommendations

Engage in organization-based goal setting to commit to healthy changes

Organizations are already making significant steps toward serving healthier meals and should be encouraged to continue making these changes. However, these steps often happen at random, without clear guidelines, and without a formal commitment. Instead, changes should be more strategic, measurable, and with a formal or informal commitment to peers within the coalition.

Suggested goals could potentially parallel the USDA Dietary Guidelines or CACFP guidelines for servings of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk products. However, organizations would be able to set their own goals and level of change. Example goals might be: By the end of the year, implement standards for the donated foods my organization will accept or reject. By the end of the summer, provide low-fat milk at every meal.

A goal setting session would be a structured way to share strategies for improving the nutritional quality of meals. By setting SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely] goals, organizations will be able to realize measurable changes and achieve successes in a short time frame. The process of goal-setting would also allow the coalition to follow up on proposed goals, and to measure the impact on the organization. In the future, organizations could institutionalize these goals by setting organizational policies around the changes.

Make nutrition the healthy default, not just the healthy choice

Currently, organizations describe nutrition as an option to be served alongside regular menu items, but not often as something to be integrated into regular menu items. Organizations describe nutrition as a choice that is left to clients, to reject unhealthy foods and eat healthy foods. However, this is an illusion of choice, especially if organizations continue to provide unhealthy foods in quantity. Integrating nutrition throughout the meal, by making healthier versions of existing meals, will go further toward improving clients' diets, and ultimately, their health.

Utilize coalition members and community resources

Organizations considering nutritional changes only have to look next to them at a coalition meeting to find an organization that is also considering a similar change, an organization that has made the change, or an organization that will help. For example, organizations wanted access to a nutritionist to confirm the nutritional quality of the meals they serve - the coalition includes three dietitians who are ready to help. Resourceful organizations will also explore new sources for healthy food - such as CSAs or different distributors or food banks.

Consolidate purchasing for cost savings based on collective power

Currently, meal program sites purchase food from five different distributors, though the majority of business goes to three distributors: Reinhart, Sysco, and Saints. Six sites do not use a distributor at all, and some sites rely significantly on grocery stores.

A group purchasing agreement could leverage the coalition's bulk buying power into cost savings for organizations. In addition, the coalition should consider negotiating an additional discount [in percent above cost] on specific healthy items, such as bulk apples. This would begin to address concerns about having to balance nutrition with cost. The group purchasing agreement should not be a contract - organizations would be able to make independent decisions about how much and what they buy.

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Recommendations

Implement routine nutrition training for all who prepare meals

Currently, many organizations are interested or engaging in volunteer training around nutrition. The coalition-wide volunteer training workshops are designed to give volunteers the tools they need to improve the quality of meals. However, staff provide a majority of meals at most sites, and some sites rely on clients for meal preparation. The coalition should help organizations develop kitchen staff training specifically around nutrition. Only 30% of sites utilizing staff for food preparation provide any nutrition training or guidelines, most of which is not structured. Whether paid or volunteer, all who prepare meals should be trained on nutritious meal planning and preparation.

Increase participation in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Currently, over half of the meal programs that are eligible for CACFP do not participate in the reimbursement program. Although the program requires additional training and paperwork from the organization, it also provides federal dollars to off-set the cost of meals. By helping organizations enroll in CACFP, the coalition would support both its goals of cost-effectiveness and nutrition. CACFP also provides guidance and requirements for nutrition. Participating organizations have used the guidelines to institute organization-wide standards for a nutritional, balanced meal.

Set standards for accepted donations

Many meal programs rely heavily on donations as a way to stretch food dollars. However, often times donated items are high in fat, sugar and of low nutritional value. Developing and implementing a unified set of standards that all meal programs in Ramsey County could adopt will help to ensure consistency in messaging and improve nutritional quality of meals and snacks in all programs who use donations.

Connect with larger initiatives

The recommendations provided here will go a long way to improving nutritional quality of meals for meal programs in Ramsey County. However, as part of the RC HMC's mission to develop a replicable model for healthy, cost-effective and culturally responsive meals, the RC HMC should connect with larger initiatives to both share their tools and strategies and expand the scope of their impact. Example partnerships might include Partners to End Hunger, Twin Cities Hunger Initiative, and the Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission. Examples of larger systems level changes that could be achieved by further reaching initiatives include changing local and state infrastructure to support increased access to healthy foods, increasing awareness of the importance of meal programs and advocating for policy decisions regarding funding to meal programs.

- ◆ **Engage in organization-based goal setting to commit to healthy changes**
- ◆ **Make nutrition the healthy default, not just the healthy choice**
- ◆ **Utilize coalition members and community resources**
- ◆ **Consolidate purchasing for cost savings based on collective power**
- ◆ **Implement routine nutrition training for all who prepare meals**
- ◆ **Increase participation in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**
- ◆ **Set standards for accepted donations**
- ◆ **Connect with larger initiatives**

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

Organization Profiles

These profiles present a closer look at specific meal programs and shelters in Ramsey County, and highlight their current work around the coalition’s priorities of nutrition, cost-effectiveness, and cultural relevance.

If an organization operates additional programs outside Ramsey County, those programs are not included, either in the following profiles or the entire report. If an organization operates more than one meal program within Ramsey County, where possible, staff were interviewed from each program site. The organizations and meal programs listed on the right participated in key informant interviews.

Each profile includes a checklist on the meal program’s eligibility requirements, reimbursement participation, and staffing model for meal preparation. Each profile also includes a weekly meal calendar. If a meal is offered on a specific day, it is colored in; if a meal is not offered, it is left blank. The number to the right is the estimated number of meals served at each meal.

KEY

Meal Program Site								
	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	# Served
Breakfast								12
Lunch								12
Dinner								12

Organization	Site
Ain Dah Yung Center	Emergency Shelter
	Beverly A. Benjamin Youth Lodge
Casa de Esperanza	Casa de Esperanza
Catholic Charities	Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center
	Catholic Charities Family Service Center
Face to Face	Safe Zone
Loaves and Fishes	Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center
	Faith Lutheran Church
	St. Matthew’s Church
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota	Safe House
	Life Haven
Missions, Inc.	Hart House
Salvation Army	Salvation Army East Side
	Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel
The Family Place	The Family Place
Union Gospel Mission	Men’s Campus
	Naomi Family Shelter
	Gospel Hill Camp
Women’s Advocates	Women’s Advocates
Women of Nations	Eagle’s Nest Shelter

Eligibility	 Open to all	 Limited to groups	 Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clients

Ain Dah Yung Center



About

Ain Dah Yung Center is a Native American-based organization that runs both an emergency shelter and a youth lodge. The Beverly A. Benjamin Youth Lodge is a transitional living program for 16 to 21 year old homeless youth. Youth work or go to school, and they can live in the Beverly A. Benjamin Youth Lodge for up to 18 months until they transition to independent housing.

The emergency shelter serves both county-placed children and runaway homeless youth. County-placed children can stay up to 90 days while waiting for a family investigation to be resolved. Runaway homeless youth are often teenagers, and can stay up to 21 days. Because it accepts children as young as five and as old as 17, the shelter is one of the few programs that can house siblings together. 70% of the Ain Dah Yung Center's clients are Native American, though they are open to all children within the age limits.

Rotating Menu

The emergency shelter recently implemented a one-week rotating menu. Not only has it brought consistency to the meal program, Emergency Shelter Director Jason Smith says it's also brought down the cost of the meal program. "We got it down to a weekly rotating schedule and tied that to our ordering and made sure we were efficient with what we were ordering. It's really improved and it's helped us save some money too. And it's more nutritious and stable – because children in crisis need structure and consistent environment, and that includes meals, too." The emergency shelter is in the process of implementing CACFP reimbursement requirements.

Cultural Relevance

Ain Dah Yung Center runs culturally specific programming through its youth group Ninijanisag. "That's where they talk about where our meals come from and, you know, more cultural and spiritual things that go with us feeding ourselves and feeding the earth and things like that." Culturally specific food, like wild rice, is part of the youth group and feasts, but is not part of the regular rotating menu.

Client Involvement

Each week, a Resident of the Week is selected by staff based on his/her behavior and how many Eagle Feathers he/she has earned. The Resident of the Week gets a gift certificate and gets to choose what the house will eat on Friday evening. Staff order and prepare the meals, and staff sit down to eat with residents family-style.

Emergency Shelter # Served

								12
								12
								12

Beverly A. Benjamin Youth Lodge # Served

								6
								6
								6

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clients

See key on page 26.



About

Casa de Esperanza works nationally and has a range of services in Minnesota enhancing Latinos access to resources and support. One of its initiatives is a shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence. The shelter focuses on Latina women and their children, and 75% of their clientele is Latino. The shelter has room for 12 women and children at a time. Approximately 90% of the women have children with them when they come to the shelter. Women can stay “as long as they need to,” depending on their situation and goals.

Client Involvement

Casa de Esperanza is one of two meal programs in Ramsey County where clients are independently responsible for meal preparation. Women are responsible for cooking for their own families, but often collaborate on communal meals. “When they’re cooking together, one will be on the stove, the other will be chopping the tomatoes and lettuce and jalapenos. And they’ll put it all together,” says Cheeley. Casa has an open kitchen, meaning residents can cook and access food at any time.

“One of our values is to make this like household setting and not like an institution,” says Beth Cheeley. Although its approach may not be possible for larger shelters, Cheeley says clients find choice refreshing. “Women have said if they’ve stayed at a different shelter, it’s “I don’t like spaghetti, and my other option would be a turkey sandwich, and I don’t like turkey sandwiches, either.”

Cultural Relevance

Staff ask women what kind of food they want and respond to those requests. This approach means that “we don’t ever get any complaints about food. Usually, that’s one of the praises when we do an exit interview. They say, “I’m so happy I got to cook here, to eat the foods I’m accustomed to, and my children don’t have to worry about what they’re eating or if they’re going to like it.” Women from different countries of origin are able to prepare their own specific cultural foods.

Nutrition

While staff is responsive to client requests, they do not purchase chips or pop, and purchase sweets only as a special occasion treat. In general, staff believe that because women prepare the food themselves, they eat healthier, and less processed foods. Staff supply staples - fruits, vegetables, meats, and dry goods like rice and beans - and also buy specific ingredients for residents based on their requests.

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	Staff	Volunteers	✓ Clients

Casa de Esperanza							# Served
							12
							12
							12

See key on page 26.



About

Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center has increasing demand for its services. Its walk-in facility in downtown St. Paul is meant to sleep 200 people, but often sleeps as many as 250. Each day, the center serves anywhere from 250 to 550 people in its cafeteria. Gerry Lauer, senior program manager for programming and operations at Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center, says “In the past, Dorothy Day has said, ‘Our doors are open, come on in.’ But the building just can’t handle the overnight [demands]. There’s just not the space, it’s not safe. But it’s really hard to turn somebody away at 9:30, 10 at night, no matter what the weather’s like. How do you do that?”

Its clientele includes people who are chronically homeless, people who are chemically dependent, and those who are low-income or unemployed and looking to supplement their resources. The center is “a source of community for folks,” says Lauer, though “as the numbers increase, it gets harder for that sense of community.”

Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center and Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel are less than a mile from each other, and they loosely coordinate services to avoid redundancy and serve their shared clientele. Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center provides lunch and dinner seven days a week, and provides breakfast on weekends, while Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel serves weekday breakfast.

Client Approach

In part because of the number of clients the center serves, it emphasizes rules and consistency in its approach to client work. When clients move through the serving line, they are all given the exact same meal - they are not able to ask for specific requests. However, Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center staff will try to work with a client who has been restricted from the center, such as allowing a client in shortly before the end of meal time so that they can get some food, while limiting the possibility of confrontation with other clients.

Volunteers

The center relies significantly on volunteer groups to prepare meals. Many volunteer groups are self-sufficient, self-run groups. Volunteers may have been working at Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center for many years, even decades. Loaves and Fishes volunteer groups purchase and prepare meals, with supervision from Loaves and Fishes staff. Clients also provide support for volunteer groups, helping to prepare, clean up, and serve for many meals.

Challenges

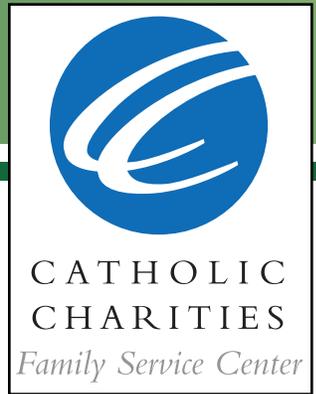
Unlike other meal programs, having enough food is not the issue for Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center. The center receives significant food donations, both due to its name recognition and its substantial cold and dry storage space. One of its main goals is to reorganize its storage space and design a recording system that allows them to better utilize the food they already have.

Eligibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Open to all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited to groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	Restricted to Clients	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reimbursement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	Summer Food Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Volunteers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clients	<input type="checkbox"/>

Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center								# Served
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	40
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	300
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	300

See key on page 26.

Catholic Charities Family Service Center



About

In the last year, Catholic Charities Family Service Center, a shelter for families who are homeless, has added 10 more beds to its facility in Maplewood. It now has room for 65 people at a time, and is almost always at capacity. Families can stay up to a month while they find more permanent housing. The shelter is open to all Ramsey County families who are homeless and without significant financial resources. The center is a partnership between Catholic Charities and Ramsey County - the county owns and manages the building, and Catholic Charities runs its programming.

Meal Planning and Preparation

Kitchen staff members prepare most of the meals, but the center regularly has individuals and volunteer groups help prepare the meal. Staff often plan meals the day of service, based on what food is available. Staff informally ask clients about what they'd like to eat, and on occasion, clients will help prepare in the kitchen.

"You have to think of who you're serving, think of their lives, and when it comes to healthy choices, you need to prepare it in a way that's going to be pleasing to them but maybe doesn't appear healthy."

Volunteer Training

On average, 20-25 meals a month are prepared by volunteer groups who buy the food, prepare it, and serve it. Kitchen Coordinator JoAnn McCullough says, "we have some groups that have been coming for 20 years. They've been coming on the first Wednesday, [every month] and they all have set menus that they've been doing forever."

Catholic Charities Family Service Center has worked with Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health to develop volunteer "menu makeover" training, in which volunteers can try healthier versions of standard recipes and learn about why nutrition is important for clients. "I think as long as you give them a reason for the change, they're open to accept it," says McCullough. "That doesn't mean that they'll change. But it's planting the seed and then they'll think about it."

Nutrition

Catholic Charities Family Service Center tries to offer healthy alternatives alongside its regular menu, and offers a salad bar at most meals. "We're going to offer them the healthy alternatives and hopefully they'll choose them," says McCullough. The center partnered with West Side Community Health Services' Health Care for the Homeless program and the University of Minnesota Extension Service [Simply Good Eating program] to teach required client nutrition classes twice a month.

Sourcing

The center has established a close relationship with Second Harvest Heartland. "There is a pallet that we always wait for, and they're very good about getting it off the truck when we get there." McCullough admits, "I have that depression mentality, like if I see something, I've got to get it because I don't know if I'm going to get it again."

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	✓ Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	✓ Staff	✓ Volunteers	Clients

Catholic Charities Family Service Center

							# Served
							65
							65
							65

See key on page 26.



About

Safe Zone is a drop in facility for 14 to 21 year-old youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Open during the afternoon and early evening, Safe Zone can refer clients to shelters and other services. The center has a small on-site emergency food shelf for its clients. The center has seen increased numbers of youth coming in and added an additional hot meal and snacks. It provides two afternoon meals that serve approximately 8 clients, at 1 pm and 3 pm, and snacks and limited sandwiches when the meals run out. Approximately 60 to 70 youth come through Safe Zone each day, but Denise Smiejad says, "I wouldn't say we have the capacity to serve everybody a hot meal."

Donations

The facility relies significantly on donations from the restaurant LeeAnn Chin's, as well as from Second Harvest Heartland and its distributor. Each day, one of the hot meals is from LeeAnn Chin's donations, for example, sweet and sour fried chicken, rice, and egg rolls. "It isn't the healthiest," says Smiejad, "but it's free."

Meal Planning and Preparation

The center's meals are prepared by support staff with limited time and other primary responsibilities, so ease of preparation and cost are important factors in the meals it serves. "If we have 85 young people down here we don't have a lot of time to be preparing meals," says Smiejad. "So it's a lasagna that you stick in the oven, take out an hour later, and set out." On occasion, the facility hosts cooking classes led by volunteers, to teach clients healthier meals on a budget. On occasion, interns or organizational volunteers will help serve a meal.

Client Involvement

Client preferences are important to Safe Zone, and youth can give feedback at town hall meetings. "A lot of it is just listening to them and what they don't like," says Smiejad. "But there's not a lot of complaints about the food, they take it for what it is and it hasn't changed much in the last couple years. I've never heard teenagers complain that we don't provide healthy options!" Safe Zone's approach is to "talk to the young people, always start with them, [see] what they're interested in, what they want. And then know that you're not going to please them all. We tell them, we're not a restaurant, this is what we have available and these are the times."

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	✓ Staff	Volunteers	Clients

Safe Zone							# Served
							8
							8

See key on page 26.



About

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota operates several programs in Ramsey County, but this report focuses on its two meal programs, Safe House, a shelter for homeless youth, and Life Haven, a transitional housing program for minor moms and their children. Safe House houses six teenagers aged 16 to 21 years old, and teenagers can stay 30 days. Staff and teenagers prepare meals together, so that teenagers can learn about meal preparation hands-on. Life Haven houses six new moms and their children, and they can stay as long as 18 months. The moms, aged 16 to 17 years old, are responsible for preparing meals by using food supplied by the organization and supplementing that with food clients purchase with WIC and SNAP assistance.

Nutrition

Nutrition became a priority for the organization in the context of the youth development model that guides the rest of its programming. Susan Phillips, director of Homeless Youth Services at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, says, "One of the big ahas for us was, pizza is a really youth-friendly food to serve groups, but is it the most nutritious option?"

Client Education

The organization has started to implement formal and informal ways of teaching youth about a healthy lifestyle on a budget. "That's how young people learn, by doing," says Phillips. "And so every chance we have, we want to create a learning opportunity for them." Along with money management and employment readiness, cooking and nutrition on a budget are included in its life skills classes. The organization struggles with issues of food access for their clients, especially once clients are on their own. Clients learn about the negative health impacts of processed foods, but find limited alternatives at community food shelves.

"Do I wish I could just wave a magic wand and all the kids would say, 'I'm never eating at McDonald's again, and I'm going to the farmers market every Saturday?' Yeah! Is that likely to happen overnight? But you start some place. You start where your clients are, and you move them gradually down a continuum to eating healthier."

Volunteers

Volunteer groups from churches bring meals to Safe House and Life Haven one to two days a week. Volunteers get a list of meal suggestions, meals "that are going to be appealing to the young people we serve but are also going to be well-rounded nutritionally because that mystery turkey hot dish doesn't really go over very well with young people."

Client Approach

Both Safe House and Life Haven value community and

creating a home-like environment. Meals are served family style, with staff and clients eating the same meal together. "We firmly believe that when people sit down and break bread together, that creates and builds community. And so not only are we trying to create nutritional opportunities, but we're using food to create community," says Phillips.

Safe House

							# Served
							6
							6
							6

Life Haven

							# Served
							12
							12
							12

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups		Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program		Summer Food Service	
Preparation	✓ Staff	✓ Volunteers	✓ Clients	

See key on page 26.

About

Hart House is a residential program for women in recovery who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program can house 24 women, and residents stay for a minimum of three months, and maximum of six months. Hart House uses a nutritionist to ensure all meals meet nutritional standards. Hart House menus are sent to the nutritionist quarterly for review.

Client Involvement

Clients are assigned to weekly kitchen chores, and one resident helps the cook prepare lunch and dinner. “The intention is two-fold, says Liz Zan Miller, the cook at Hart House. “One is to give me help, but two, a lot of people come from a homeless situation and may not know how to cook...And it’s kind of my role to break it down into steps and [show them] this is something you can do at home, this is not expensive....You’re a smart person, you can feed your family.”

Residents are encouraged to share recipes with the cook. “ That’s one of the talks I have with them, if they have a favorite family dish or they want to figure out how grandma made something...They always have ideas – unsolicited and solicited ideas – and I listen to everything and my response is always, let’s do it together.”

Nutrition

Zan Miller generally makes meals from scratch and buys fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables. Breakfast is a continental breakfast, but with fresh fruits, and occasional homemade baked goods. Hart House’s menus often include “things that people may not have had before...[like] Today we had hummus, and every one said, “what is that?” and you say ground up chickpeas. I don’t expect everyone to eat it, but...I put a little dab on and say,” tell me if you like it, and if you hate it, don’t eat it.”

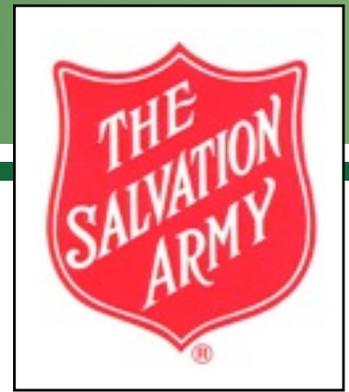
One of the strategies that Hart House’s cook uses to encourage healthy eating is to give creative names to foods. The program regularly serves “A big fat Greek salad.” “It’s a salad, but who likes to eat ‘salad.’ Yuck!” says Zan Miller. “But here you go, ‘big fat Greek salad,’ put some kalamata olives, feta cheese, and you’ve got it going...And here’s my, this is Liz’s rules on naming stuff. You need a place name – Romania, it doesn’t matter, France. You have an action word like ‘fried’...then pick the best ingredient that everyone loves. And I think the best one I ever made up was ‘Romanian Chiffon Pie.’”

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clients

Hart House							# Served
							24
							18
							20

See key on page 26.

Salvation Army East Side



About

Salvation Army East Side is a drop-in facility that serves a weekday lunch to 100 to 150 people, and also operates an on-site food shelf. It has an open door, no-questions-asked policy, and mainly serves low-income adults and families from within the neighborhood. Clients know that “they can come in everyday and eat and it’s not a hassle to people,” says Jessica Hering, East Side team leader.

Meal Planning and Preparation

At East Side, kitchen staff often plan meals the day of service, based on what food is available from donations and from food banks. Saint Paul Public Schools is a major donor of food during the school year. The organization tries to provide a balanced meal with all the food groups, a main dish and two sides. However, the organization also prioritizes ease of preparation because it only has one kitchen staff. Volunteer groups purchase, prepare, and serve meals about seven times a month, and some volunteers just come to serve or help the staff prepare.

Client Approach

Faith is a part of St. Paul Citadel’s programming, and has been part of the Salvation Army’s mission since its beginnings with William Booth, a preacher who wanted to share the gospel, but realized if people were hungry, they would not be able to truly hear its words. At lunch time, there are devotions and prayer around the meal.

Nutrition

East Side is planning to reverse the order of its meals in order to prioritize devotion time and nutrition. It currently serves coffee and pastries before the meal, followed by devotion and prayer, then serves the actual meal. It plans to serve the meal, and start the prayer program after people have begun to eat, and then provide sweets after or with the meal. Though clients look forward to the pastries, Hering says, “We certainly want to emphasize more of the meal itself as opposed to just giving people sweets when they walk in the door...It’s kind of people’s choice, but I think encouraging people to eat a nutritious meal first and then have their dessert would be a better plan.” Hering anticipates some temporary resistance to the change. She says, “I think any change you make is always disruptive, especially to the regulars we have who have been coming every day. But I think after a few weeks, people are pretty flexible.”

Challenges

One of its challenges is a lack of cold storage space and its dining room, which is housed in the church gymnasium. Tables and chairs must be set up and taken down each day by volunteers. “It’s just a lot of work every day and if we had a dining room we really would have more time to work on other things,” says Hering. In addition, there are only enough tables and chairs for 70 - 80 people, a portion of the clients the center serves.

Eligibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open to all	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited to groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	<input type="checkbox"/> Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> Clients

Salvation Army East Side

						# Served
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	100				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					

See key on page 26.

Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel



About

Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel is a drop-in facility in downtown St. Paul that serves a weekday breakfast to 250 people. The meal program's clientele includes people who are low-income and homeless; and the center also provides other social services throughout the day, such as a licensed day care, on-site food shelf, and senior programming.

St. Paul Citadel and Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center are less than a mile from each other, and they loosely coordinate services to avoid redundancy and serve their shared clientele. Catholic Charities Dorothy Day Center provides lunch and dinner seven days a week, and provides breakfast on weekends, while Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel serves weekday breakfast.

Client Approach

Breakfast always includes homemade hot soup, which is part of the Salvation Army's creed of "soup, soap, and sermon." Faith is a part of St. Paul Citadel's programming, and has been part of the Salvation Army's mission since its beginnings with William Booth, a preacher who wanted to share the gospel, but realized if people were hungry, they would not be able to truly hear its words. Each morning at St. Paul Citadel, there are devotions and prayer around the meal.

Volunteers

Meals are prepared by staff, with significant volunteer help from groups and individuals. Volunteer "Mama Helen" is in her late 70s and has been with the center since it began. Mama Helen makes the homemade soup, and though she's cut back, she cooks at the shelter most days.

Nutrition

The morning meal may include traditional breakfast foods (like grits, pancakes, eggs, bacon, and pastries) or non-breakfast foods (like chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, and vegetables). The center tries to offer a balanced, nutritional meal. "We have these things available," says James Green, the lead cook, "But it's up to them to eat it or not."

The organization emphasizes consistency in its meal program. "All we've got to do is switch from peas to carrots and we've got a problem...we've got a riot," says Dobler. "I had a lady throw a tray at me because I gave her peas instead of carrots because at that point we had switched." The center is not able to do special requests because of the large number of clients they serve. "We're not singing, 'Have it your way,' says Dobler. "We're singing, 'If you want to have a meal, come in. Otherwise, leave.'"

Challenges

One of its challenges is storage space, which the meal program shares with on-site food shelf. The center receives food donations from 54 different sources, but a major donor during the school year is Saint Paul Public Schools. Its diverse donation base is one of the center strategies for limiting cost. Dobler says resiliency is part of the center culture: "It's kind of the slogan we have here: We will make it work, it doesn't matter how we get chopped, sliced, or diced."

Eligibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open to all	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited to groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	<input type="checkbox"/> Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> Clients

Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel

Salvation Army St. Paul Citadel							# Served
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	250					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						

See key on page 26.



About

The Family Place is a day shelter for families who are homeless, meaning that families spend their day at the shelter and then are transported to churches for the night. The shelter is open to all families who are homeless and without significant financial resources. “We identify a family as an adult who has legal custody of a minor, so we have two-parent families, one-parent families, grandparents with grandchildren. As long as you have legal custody of a minor, you are a family,” says Margaret Lovejoy, the executive director of The Family Place.

Meal Planning and Preparation

Most of the center’s meals are prepared by staff, although volunteers prepare many of the weekend meals [they bring the food in, cook it, serve it, and eat with the families]. Meals are served family style to encourage community and to make it easier for parents with several children. Because it serves both adults and children, Lovejoy says, “We try to keep it in the middle of the road, so that children can enjoy the meal as well as their parents, it’s nothing so restrictive or bland so that the parents wouldn’t want to eat it.”

Nutrition

Since joining the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition, The Family Place “really started to look at better ways of feeding the families,” says Lovejoy. Involvement in the coalition and conversations with coalition members resulted in the organization reassessing its current practices. “We just went along, doing what we did...No one was saying this is good or not good or there’s more efficient ways of serving the food, or different vendors to look at. When I went to the coalition meeting, [I saw] there’s another way of looking at things.”

The organization began making small menu changes like adding more fruits, serving more whole grains and less bread overall. It made these changes with input from clients, says Lovejoy. “We serve bread for breakfast with toast or bagels and such, we serve bread at lunch with sandwiches, and there’s bread again at the diner meal...I talked with the families and said, if we were to cut back on the bread that’s served, would that be a big hardship for you? And they agreed that we were serving too much bread. So we’ve cut back on bread.”

Rotating Menu

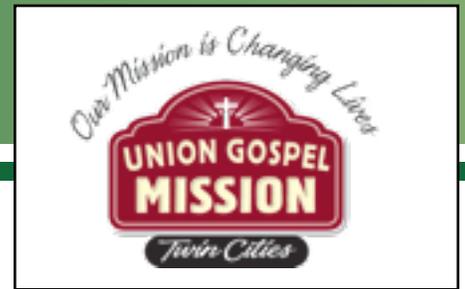
The Family Place decided to experiment with a two-week rotating menu. “We’re seeing how it works,” says Lovejoy. “And after a month or so...We’ll sit down as a staff and see, how is this working?” Though mainly used by staff, the organization also hopes the rotating menu will be used by volunteer groups to prevent accidental meal repetition, which can occur when independent volunteer groups don’t communicate with each other.

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	Clients

The Family Place							# Served
							40
							40
							40

See key on page 26.

Union Gospel Mission



About

Union Gospel Mission runs three meal programs in Ramsey County: its Men’s Campus, Naomi Family Shelter, and Union Gospel Hill summer camp. At its Men’s Campus, the meal program serves 200 men at every meal, many of whom are homeless, low-income, or participants in a social service program at Union Gospel Mission. Its numbers fluctuate within the month, and it may serve as many as 250 people toward the end of the month. Approximately 90% of food service staff at the Men’s Campus are former clients.

At Naomi Family Center, the meal program serves three meals a day to 70 women and children seeking shelter, many of whom are fleeing domestic abuse. Naomi also provides meals at an adjoining daycare facility for resident children and neighborhood children. Traditionally, the menu has included items such as grits, bar-b-que meats, and heavy sauces. “[The kitchen manager] knows what [clients] like, and it’s not healthy...but it’s time to start looking at nutritional quality” says Ben Johnson, the food operations general manager. At its summer camp, the meal program serves lunch to 300 children. Because of the combined volume of its meal programs and staff negotiation skills, Union Gospel Mission was able to negotiate a favorable price agreement with its distributor.

Meal Planning and Preparation

Meal planning priorities center around cost-effectiveness and what is available at Second Harvest Heartland, says Johnson. “My job is to serve as many meals as possible for as low cost as possible,” says Johnson, who works with the kitchen supervisor at each location to plan the menu. Union Gospel Mission is working on a four-week rotating menu, but currently, meals are planned the week before service.

Nutrition

Union Gospel Mission has made nutritional meals a priority, in response to seeing the impact of food on its clients’ health. “There’s [often] an ambulance that comes to the Mission to pick someone up for diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease,” says Johnson. Meals are generally balanced, with protein, vegetables, a salad and salad bar, and though the center offers a sugary drink, it tries to offer 100% juice when possible.

Johnson says, “You’ve got to balance grown adult men coming in who have been out on the street for a really long time, out in the rain, they haven’t eaten for awhile and they want a hot, thick, hearty meal. I’m not just going to tell someone who is older than me, who’s been out on the street, that they can’t have something like that. I’m not ready to do that. I don’t think that’s my place to do that. But I think that it *is* my place, in the greater well being of people to try [to provide healthy food].”

Men’s Campus

						# Served
						200
						200
						200

Naomi Family Shelter

						# Served
						70
						70
						70

Union Gospel Hill Camp

						# Served
						300

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups [Men’s Campus]	Restricted to Clients [Naomi Shelter & Hill Camp]
Reimbursement	✓ Child & Adult Care Food Program [Naomi Shelter]	✓ Summer Food Service [Hill Camp]	
Preparation	✓ Staff	✓ Volunteers	✓ Clients

See key on page 26.



About

Women's Advocates is a domestic abuse shelter for approximately 50 women and children. Women can stay from one night to several months, depending on their situation and goals. The shelter often has around 30 children living there, and depending on the child's age, he or she is in school or at the shelter during the day.

Cultural Relevance

Clients are given the choice of cooking for themselves or eating the prepared meal during their stay. If women choose to cook, they come into the kitchen once a day to prepare dinner and lunch for the following day. Though few women choose this option, it may be appealing for families with specific diets, such as African immigrants. In the past, Women's Advocates has experimented with different models of client involvement. Clients used to take turns being responsible for cooking for the rest of the shelter, but the organization felt that was a stress that could be taken on by staff in order to let women focus on their next steps.

Nutrition

Women's Advocates has made substantial changes to its menu in the last year, like serving salad at every meal. Another such change was replacing white bread with whole wheat bread, and introducing brown rice and whole wheat pasta into the menu. "I'll be honest with you, we made that change and it was very challenging," says facilities manager Shirley Johnson, both for staff and clients. "It's hard for women because they're just not used to it. [But] once you do it, then it doesn't bother you...As hard as it is [to make change], it gets better. It does get easier."

The shelter also restricts pop and kool aid from coming into the shelter, which is a point of contention for some clients. "It's not healthy, it's wasted calories, it's not healthy for you or your children, it's got a bunch of calories and we're not going to take part in something that's not healthy for you. If you have pop, most likely, the children will see you drinking it and they'll want it, and then they're not going to want milk." Residents are able to give feedback and meal suggestions every week at the resident meeting and in a suggestion box.

Client Approach

When clients are trying to fill immediate, basic needs like shelter, they may turn to comfort foods which may be less healthy. "We get residents who come in who are stressed and they want to feed that stress. So I tell them, guys, as hard as it is and as much as I want to see you satisfied, I also want to see you healthy. I don't want to see you eat bags of chips that have no nutritional value, just to satisfy the moment," says Johnson. "Some of it is the periods we're in in our lives. I tell them, you're not going to be here forever. You're feeling this way today but you won't be here forever."

The shelter's recent emphasis on nutrition and wellness has resulted in staff losing weight themselves. "We're trying to be a healthy shelter together, not just residents but staff as well...We want to practice what we preach."

Eligibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	Open to all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited to groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Child & Adult Care Food Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	Summer Food Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clients

Women's Advocates

<input type="checkbox"/>	# Served							
<input type="checkbox"/>	52							
<input type="checkbox"/>	52							
<input type="checkbox"/>	52							

See key on page 26.

Women of Nations/Eagle's Nest Shelter

About

Women of Nation's Eagle's Nest Shelter is a Native American-based domestic abuse shelter for 46 women and children. Though the shelter is geared toward Native American clients, currently, the majority of their clients are African American.

Nutrition

Scott Schauls, the cook coordinator, says that he thinks "it's probably about 75% good nutrition. There's that 25% that could be better. I'm working on it." The shelter has incorporated occasional vegetarian options into its meals, and provides a salad bar each day. About 15 to 30 minutes "before I serve my main meal out there, I always set up my salad bar. Because I want them to eat that first, and they usually do," says Schauls. The meal program's approach to nutrition is to provide a variety of healthy options and to make healthier versions of comfort foods. The shelter doesn't just serve apples and oranges; it serves mangos, grapes, and kiwis.

Meal Planning and Preparation

The menu is roughly planned a month in advance, though it can change with what's available at Second Harvest Heartland. When planning the shelter's menu, Schauls says, "First, you've got to go with the cost. Second of all, if it's nutritious. That's the balance, you know." Since many of its clients are kids, the shelter also prioritizes kid-friendliness in its meals. "You have to make it kid friendly. But you also have to realize that they have to eat nutritionally," says Schauls. "Just like any parent, you have to give them good choices: protein, fruits and vegetables. Hopefully, you give them the choice where half their plates are fruits and vegetables."

Sourcing

Women of Nations has a partnership with Boston Scientific, whose corporate staff delivers produce from their one-acre on-site garden. During the growing season, Women of Nations is able to source a significant percentage of their produce from Boston Scientific. "We'll get a lot from Boston scientific but it varies. Like the tomatoes won't be ready for a few more weeks, and stuff like that. They'll start coming in big time."

Eligibility	Open to all	Limited to groups	Restricted to Clients
Reimbursement	Child & Adult Care Food Program	Summer Food Service	
Preparation	✓ Staff	Volunteers	Clients

Eagle's Nest Shelter

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45
45

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition

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Thank you so much for meeting with me to talk about your program.

The Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition (RC HMC) is a new network of eleven shelters, meal programs and key stakeholder organizations in Ramsey County, focused on improving the nutritional value of meals for clients. We're interviewing you and other staff at shelters and meal programs throughout Ramsey County, in order to create tools, practices and strategies that are effective for the diverse populations served in Ramsey County. This information is intended to give the coalition information each organization's challenges, what works well in your meal program, and what advice your organization has for other meal providers; all with a particular focus on improving meal quality and efficiency.

Our conversation will be transcribed and returned to you so that you can review it for accuracy. It will be analyzed by a University of Minnesota graduate student in public health, who will prepare a full report based on all of our interviews that will include case studies and recommendations for next steps of the coalition. You can use the report and case studies to help share the story of the valuable services you provide, and learn helpful strategies from other organizations.

Before we get started, please know that this conversation will in no way impact your relationship with Ramsey County or any of the organizations represented on the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition. Please feel free to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

Do you agree with the information you provide being used in the way I have just described?

[Note for interviewer: Get verbal consent from participant]

We would like to record this interview to ensure accuracy and consistency, since several people will be conducting the interviews. The information will only be used by us. You will be able to review the transcript after our interview and make any corrections to the information. You can ask to pause the recording at any time. Do you agree to our conversation being recorded?

[Note for interviewer: Get verbal consent from participant]

Interviewee Name and Title:

I'd like to learn more about your current meal program.

1. Brief overview

a. How long has your meal program been around in its current form?	
a. Have there been any major changes in the last 5 years? If so, please describe them. <i>Probe:</i> Staffing? Building? Vendors? Operations? Client base? Need?	
a. How many sites does your organization operate? Where are they located? Who is the primary population of each site?	

a. What are the eligibility requirements for your program? <i>Prompt:</i> Who is allowed to eat at your program? Is there a time limit on how long they stay at the program or how often they can be served?	
a. Is your program operated by a parent organization? Please describe. (e.g. the Dorothy Day Center is operated by Catholic Charities)	

I'd like to try to paint a picture of what your present meal program looks like.

2. Present Meal Program

a. Does your program serve breakfast? Lunch? Dinner? Snacks? Other food?	
a. How many people do you serve at each meal? i. Breakfast ii. Lunch iii. Dinner iv. Snacks/Other	
a. How many meals do you serve each week? Month?	
a. Are there any differences between meals in terms of eligibility requirements?	
a. Who does your meal program serve? <i>[Interviewer Note: Providing exact figures may be difficult. Estimates are acceptable.]</i> <i>Probe:</i> Age (kids, teens, older adults)? Gender? Ethnicity?	

Next, we'll talk about what a typical day looks like in terms of planning, preparing and serving meals.

3. Planning

a. Who plans the menu? <i>[Probe: job title, background]</i>	
a. How do you decide the menu?	
a. How far in advance do you plan the menu? Rotating?	
a. How often do you stray from the menu? Why?	
a. How often do you run out of food or the main item served? What are reasons for this? What do you do then?	

<p>a. What planning considerations do you make for the various needs of your clients, such as age, culture, food allergies or others? <i>[Prompt: (Based on earlier responses, specifically ask about various populations the organization serves that may have special needs]</i> What about the children or older adults? What about certain ethnic populations and cultural foods? Etc.</p>	
<p>a. When planning your meals, what factors are important to consider or balance: client satisfaction, culture, program cost, ease of preparation, nutrition, and other concerns?</p>	

4. Preparation and Serving

<p>a. Who prepares and serves the food?</p>	
<p>a. Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. How many food service staff do you have? ii. Do you offer any nutritional training or meal planning/ prep guidance for staff? 	
<p>a. Volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. How many volunteers do you have? ii. Where are they from? iii. How often do they typically come, and do volunteers come on a consistent schedule? iv. Where do they get the food? v. <i>[Probe: Is it donated or purchased? From where?]</i> vi. Do you offer any nutritional training or meal planning/ prep guidance for volunteers? vii. What kind of supervision do volunteers receive? 	
<p>a. To what degree are clients involved in meal preparation or planning?</p>	
<p>a. Is anyone else involved in meal preparation or planning?</p>	

5. Sourcing

a. What are the main sources for food for your program (purchased and donated)? [Prompt: Estimate percentages]	
a. Do you have contracts with any vendors? If so, what are they?	
a. What types of items do you receive from each vendor/donor?	
a. In general, which items are purchased and which are donated?	
a. How often do you receive deliveries? Can you estimate the number of drops/deliveries per week/month from each of your main vendors? How often do you receive drops from other sources?	
a. How many cases do you order on a weekly/monthly basis? Quarterly basis? <i>(note: this information can be found on invoices from vendors such as Sysco and Second Harvest)</i>	
a. Do you go shopping at any stores or pick-up food from anywhere? How often?	
a. Do you participate in any group purchasing or receive discounted rates now? If so, please explain.	

6. Record-keeping

a. What records do you keep related to meals (e.g. CACFP, # of clients served, etc)?	
a. Are the records kept on paper or electronically?	
a. Who is responsible for recording meals? Staff? Volunteers?	
a. What works well in record-keeping?	
a. What would you like to strengthen or develop?	

We'd like to know more about the kind of resources and tools that your program has access to.

a. How much storage space do you estimate you have? Refrigerator space? Freezer space? Dry storage space?	
a. How would you describe your kitchen facilities? Oven space? Prep space? Adequate pots/pans? [Note for interviewer: <i>Do they have the capacity to serve meals to who they need to serve?</i>]	

a. What kind of community resources or partnerships does your food program have besides those mentioned already?	
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Next I'd like to ask you a few questions about funding and finances if you are willing to share that information.

7. Funding

a. Do you participate in any reimbursement programs? If so, which ones? (e.g. CACFP, Summer Food Service Program)	
a. How do you finance your meal program?	
a. Do you have a food budget? Are you willing to share how much that is or how much you have to spend per person per meal?	
a. How does your current budget limit what you can buy? How does this affect the meals that are served?	

Since the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition focuses on nutrition, I'd like to get your perspective on a few things related to nutrition in your program.

8. Nutritional Value

a. How would you describe the nutritional value of what is currently served?	
a. How would you make meals healthier if you could?	
a. What barriers do you feel you would face in actually making those changes?	

9. Support

a. How much interest and support for healthy options (such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean protein) do you think there is from your clients? Staff? Volunteers? Management? Board of directors? Other stakeholders?	
a. What would help your organization the most in serving more healthy and nutritious meals? [Interviewer Prompt: Menu templates? Access to a nutritionist? Additional storage? Additional staff? Cost savings? What else?]	

10. General

a. What works well in your meal program?	
a. What are the challenges?	
a. If another organization came to you for advice regarding improving a meal program, what would you advise?	
a. What lessons learned would you pass along?	

Closing

a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your meal program that we haven't talked about yet? Is there another person in your organization who you would recommend I talk to?	
a. What other meal programs do you think would be interested in this? Are we missing any from our list?	

As a reminder, the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition (RCHMC) is a relatively new network of eleven shelters, meal programs and key stakeholder organizations in Ramsey County, focused on improving the nutritional value of meals for clients. We're looking into things like group purchasing and information sharing among coalition members.

Would you be interested in joining the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition? [Note for interviewer: This could be a shared position among several members of the organization. Make note of response and reasons why or why not.]

Would you like me to add you to the email distribution list? [If yes, list email address:
 _____]

Our regular meetings are on the second Thursday of each month from 1-3pm. We rotate the meeting locations around so we can visit the sites of all our members.

Thank you for your time. The next step is that I will send you a summary of our interview for you to check for accuracy. It will then be compiled into a case study to really highlight some of the work being done in various meal programs – in addition to a summary report of all the meal programs. You will receive a copy of the report toward the end of the summer.

Thank you again and if you have any questions you can reach me at:

Share your contact information.

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition
Baseline Assessment Introduction Template
May 24, 2011

Dear (insert director/interviewee name here)

We are writing on behalf of the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition (RCHMC). The RCHMC represents a new network of eleven shelters, meal programs and key stakeholder organizations in Ramsey County, which focus on improving the nutritional value of meals for clients. Convened by Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, the RCHMC seeks to develop a new paradigm for serving meals to homeless and at-risk populations in Ramsey County. This model will embody a new collaborative approach to distribution, menu development, volunteer training, food sourcing and client health, resulting in a healthier community. As you know, good nutrition is an important piece of rebuilding lives and more effectively dealing with stress.

In order to create tools, practices and strategies that are inclusive and effective for the diverse populations served in shelters and meal programs in Ramsey County, **we request a short interview with the appropriate staff person at (insert organization name here)**. We are aiming to collect information from all shelters and meal programs in Ramsey County. This information is intended to give the coalition information on client, staff, volunteers, food sourcing, capacity, and other key topics to paint a picture of what happens in Ramsey County. Moreover, we would like to collect information on each organization's challenges, what works well in your meal program, and what advice your organization has for other meal providers; all with a particular focus on improving meal quality and efficiency.

The information from each organization will be written up and returned so that each respective organization can review for facts and interpretation. A full report across organizations with recommendations for next steps of the coalition will result and will be available to you. You can use the information to help share the story of the valuable services you provide with key stakeholders, policy makers, and learn helpful strategies and common challenges from other organizations.

We would also like to invite you to join the Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition. We meet on the second Thursday of each month from 1-3 pm. For more information about the coalition, including the mission and vision, please see the attached brochure (PDF titled: Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition). The RCHMC was also recently featured in a story on Minnesota Public Radio called "A focus on healthier food for the homeless."

If you have any questions about the interview or the RCHMC, please feel free to contact one of us. We hope to schedule interviews during the month of June and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Name, on behalf of Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition co-chairs:

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