

Anchorage Community Mental Health Services - Seeds of Change Transitional Youth Program

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November 7, 2014



ACMHS at a Glance

- We are a community mental health center serving Anchorage.
- Programs serving both children and adults:
 - Therapeutic preschool program (Little Tykes)
 - Child and Family Programs 6-18
 - Transitional Aged Youth 18-24



ACMHS at a Glance

- Adult outpatient
- Homeless outreach
- Housing services
- Senior services (Alzheimer's day care)
- Roughly 1600 adults and 250 children and families served at any time.



Common Challenges Facing Transitional Youth

- High rates of unemployment/underemployment, lower wages.
- High school dropout rates.
- Involvement with criminal justice system.
- High rates of homelessness/unsafe housing.
- Development of more chronic mental health & substance abuse problems.
- Less community engagement.
- High risk for victimization.
- High utilization of public systems of support.



ACMHS Seeds of Change

1. Answers the question: *“How do you provide formal and informal supports/services in a normalized setting to youth who are aging out of children's services?”*
2. Supported part-time employment for 16 transition-aged youth (18-24) who will work in an urban greenhouse setting growing and selling fresh vegetables.
3. Practical job skills and experiences that will allow youth to obtain and maintain competitive employment positions.
4. Social enterprise program – balance of business/financial sustainability with the provision of mental health, educational, vocational, supports to youth.



Why a Social Enterprise?

1. Funding sustainability.
2. Providing services in a normalized setting.
3. “Real world,” challenging opportunities to acquire and apply skills.
4. Youth recognized as resources and not merely as “problems.”



ACMHS Seeds of Change Program Highlights:

1. *Seeds of Change* will provide youth with comprehensive, individualized transitional services that are coordinated with other community programs.
2. *Seeds of Change* will provide supported employment.
3. *Seeds of Change* youth will participate in all aspects of running an urban agriculture business, with increasing job responsibilities and leadership opportunities.
4. *Seeds of Change* will collaborate with other empirically supported youth-serving national organizations, such as The Food Project of Boston.
5. *Seeds of Change* will provide food to children and families who are experiencing hunger.



ACMHS Seeds of Change Program Outcomes:

1. Higher rates of permanent employment and increased job retention.
2. Youth who participate in Seeds of Change will earn a living wage.
3. Completed educational and/or vocational training.
4. Safe and stable housing arrangements.
5. Less reliance upon public support, including fewer emergency room visits, reduced involvement with the legal system.



ACMHS Seeds of Change Program Outcomes:

6. Creation of jobs that provide meaningful job skills and business experience.
7. Less disruption in daily functioning due to mental health and substance abuse problems in young adulthood.
8. Less victimization of transitional age youth.
9. Youth will be empowered to help develop the local food system and improve the greater community.



Mission of The Food Project of Boston

“To create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system.”



The Food Project of Boston

Philosophy & Values:

- Invite young people to see themselves, others, and the world differently.
- Through meaningful and challenging work, young people contribute purposefully to society by growing food for the hungry and caring for the land;
- Build a community where youth discover and develop their talents, make friends and test themselves physically, mentally and emotionally.



The Food Project of Boston

- Youth and adult partnerships are at the heart of our best work;
- Our strength grows from diverse experiences, backgrounds, cultures and points of view;
- Expand permanently each person's recognition of himself or herself as an agent for social change.



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

--Margaret Mead



Food Justice &
Local Foods:
A Report from
South-Central
and Southeast
Alaska
AFPC 11/7/14

Dr. Tracey Burke,
UAA School of Social Work

Ms. Cara Durr,
Alaska Food Coalition

Discourses of Food (In)Security in Alaska and the Arctic

- Locally grown movement
 - Disaster preparedness and self-sufficiency
 - Obesity, nutrition/health
- Alaska Natives and Subsistence
 - Cultural import of subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering
 - Climate change and regulatory environment
 - Nutrition/health
- Poverty/economic (in)security

Context of Study

- Long-standing collaboration with Food Bank of Alaska (FBA) and the Alaska Food Coalition (AFC) shaped research interests and access to pantries and participants
- FBA has been regular participant in Hunger in America
 - For poverty-related hunger, little known in AK about rural conditions

Overall questions

- How do national patterns regarding poverty-related food insecurity manifest in rural AK?
- Beyond statistical portraits of food-insecure people,
 - Why do some people struggle more than others
 - How do they cope with limited funds and food resources in locally specific ways

"Local foods"

- **Harvested** locally (in Alaska)
 - Grown (gardens, agriculture; limited ranching/herding)
 - Hunted
 - Fished
 - Gathered

Convenience sample – regions and communities

- 9 communities
 - 800-9,000 people, average 3,800
 - 5 very small/small; 4 medium/large
 - 5 southcentral; 4 southeast
 - 3 accessible by road; 5 by ferry; 1 by both

Sampling: people

- 34 adult individuals (households)
- Half from southcentral; half from southeast
- 11 men, 23 women
- Minor children in 17 (50%)
- 19 (56%) households have at least 1 working adult
- 29 (85%) receive means-tested assistance
- 29 White (85%), 4 Alaska Native (12%), 1 Black (3%); 3 bi-racial
 - Some Whites married to people of color

Interviews

- Questions/domains
 - Dinner last night (what *are* they eating)
 - Good meal (what would they like to eat)
 - Experiences with pantry
 - Worries about having enough food
 - Acquiring food besides at pantry & store
 - Overall evaluation of family's eating
- 1:1, took ~1 hour each; audio-recorded

Analysis

- Interview questions frame initial interests
- Open-coded 10 transcripts for surprises
- Overall characterizations for each participant-household re:
 - Need (reliance on pantry)and
 - Engagement with local foods of all sorts

"Need"

Level of need	Centrality of pantry to family's well-being?	Number of families
High need	The pantry is really important; they would skip (more) meals without it	12
Medium-high		6
Medium	the pantry reduces anxiety and improves the quality of their diet	8
Low-medium		2
Low need	they could probably get by without the pantry but it provides an important cushion	6

Engagement w/ local food

- High involvement: 10
- Medium-high: 1

- Medium: 9
- Low-medium: 4

- Low involvement: 7
- No involvement: 3

- All 5 Native families rank Medium to High

Need and local foods

- No apparent relationship between reliance on pantry and engagement with local foods
 - given that entire sample relied on pantries, local foods are no panacea
- Further exploration of those with the most (n=11) and least (n=10) engagement with local foods

Local foods preferred

- Nutrition, quality, taste
- Some local foods being eaten now
 - More meat and fish than produce
- The “good meals” consisted of foods participants wanted but could not access
- Good meals often included (more)
 - Game meat (especially moose)
 - Fish (salmon, halibut)
 - Fresh vegetables

Prefer local

- "The beef in the store really isn't that fresh, and it's really expensive, and I have a lot of fun going out hunting and processing it, and you know, kind of take pride in how we process our meat, and I really enjoy eating venison from me or my friends."

Local food requires knowledge

- Strong association between engagement with local foods, and
- Knowledge of food preparation and storage and/or
 - How to cook from scratch
 - How to can
 - How to process meat and fish

Knowledge of storage

- "When I get food stamps, every once in a while, probably like every six months, we will buy, like, about 50 pounds worth of chicken or hamburger if it's on sale, when it is on sale, and we can it. So we can our meat so it lasts longer. And we have -- you know, it's like a pound per jar. And so it lasts longer and stays fresh."

Local food requires equipment

- Strong association between engagement with local foods, and
- Access to supplies & equipment
 - Greenhouse, soil
 - Boat & gas
 - Canning supplies
 - Freezers and freezing supplies

Access to supplies

- "If I could grow more stuff, I'd be, you know, happier, but finding dirt here is like - - when you live on a rock--. It's terrible, unless you go buy it, and I can't do that. I spent \$70 one year on dirt for one boat [planter box]."
- Cara: "So it sounds like, even if, you know, you do have just easy access to all this food, you know, the fish and the deer, I mean, you do still need to be able to put gas in your boat to go out there?"
- response: "Yeah. Exactly."

Caveats to local food as resources: Unpredictable

- "[Except] this last year we didn't get a moose...and 800 pounds of meat goes a long way."
- "Carrots grow good. Last year was a poor year. It was too cold and wet."

Caveats to local food: Seasonal and human factors

- We're pretty low on everything now, this time of year [May].... and we had problems last year. We had -- we were up in Anchorage for three-and-a-half weeks for medical, and while we were gone, somebody swiped most of our fish.

Initial policy recommendation:

- Look for ways to increase access to local foods of all sorts

Policy implications: SNAP

- Food Stamps pays for some subsistence equipment in the most remote communities
- Subsistence uses of SNAP/Food Stamps are framed as an alternative to purchasing food only when market foods are unavailable, purchase is preferred
 - **why?**
 - Nutritionally, local foods better

Policy: SNAP

- Expand existing “subsistence” program geographically to include ferry- and road-accessible communities
- Allow use of SNAP for food-procurement and –processing items
 - Freezing and canning supplies
 - Allow use for certain transportation and clothing items
 - Adjust eligibility criteria if some way to help people with initial investment
 - Without limiting near-term purchase of food items

Future research

- Comparable study in remote communities

Thank you to...

- To the USDA ERS RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies
- The Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University
- Food Bank of Alaska
- The pantries who facilitated the project
- The pantry users who participated in the interviews



THE ALASKA FARMERS' MARKET- QUEST PROGRAM

DIANE PECK, MPH, RDN
ALASKA DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

AK Food Festival & Conference
November 7, 2014

Terms to Know:

- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps)
- EBT – Electronic Benefits Transfer card

