POLICY, SYSTEM, ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES IN PIERCE COUNTY FOOD PANTRIES

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department gave to Emergency Food Network (EFN) through the Prevention and Public Health Fund supporting efforts in Pierce County to make it easier for people to make good choices that impact health. The following stories show the changes in Pierce County Food Programs as a result of that support.

Self-Select Model

As of June 2017, 43 of EFN’s 58 partner food pantries use a self-select or hybrid model that combines features of the pre-bagged and self-select model, and an additional food pantry will be transitioning to self-select this year. EFN encourages all of our partners to use a self-select model because it provides guests with the dignity of selecting their own food and minimizes waste when guests are not given food they won’t use.

The self-select model also better serves a diverse population of guests. People are able to select foods that are culturally appropriate, an important part of serving people with dignity. EFN helps our Partner Programs serve a wide variety of guests by distributing culturally significant food to sites where guests will be the most familiar with them.

St. Andrew Emmanuel Food Pantry (pictured) is an example of a program that utilizes a hybrid model. The food pantry provides guests with a grocery list of the foods available. Visitors make their list and wait outside of the food pantry building while a volunteer prepares their bag of groceries and hands it back to them. When the food pantry used a pre-bagged model, they would find cans of food left on the property or guests would go through their bags and hand back the food they couldn’t or wouldn’t eat. By thinking strategically, they are providing a guest-centered service, even in the confines of their small space.

Farm Stands

Students at Bates Technical College built farms stands that are being used at sites throughout Pierce County. The utilization of fruit and vegetable stands make food pantries a more beautiful place and draw individuals to the food that is on display. Food stands highlight the local produce that is grown at EFN’s Mother Earth Farm, showcasing familiar foods, like pears, and introducing guests to foods they may not be familiar with, such as radicchio and tatsoi.

Adding beauty to a food pantry improves the environment and shows guests that they are valued and welcome visitors. Gardeners are encouraged to get involved by donating their extra produce to the food pantry in their neighborhood.
Reducing Barriers

While providing food to our Partner Programs is critical to serving the community, our Partner Programs must also be accessible to the community in order for the food to make an impact. We encourage our Partner Programs to make their hours more accessible to working families that may only be able to visit on weekends or in the evenings.

When programs partner with EFN, they have a reliable source of food that can allow them to make dramatic changes to their program model. Programs like Harvest House have shared that after partnering with EFN, they have been able to lift restrictions on how frequently guests can visit, guests can now visit as many times as needed throughout the month. Harvest House is also preparing to add an additional day of service to their program which will expand access.

Environmental Change

PCAF (the Pierce County AIDS Foundation) is a great example of how thoughtful partnership results in an environmental change for guests. PCAF once had to call clients and remind them to come pick up their bag of groceries, which contained food PCAF could afford to buy.

Now that PCAF has fresh produce and nutritious staples from EFN, guests are lining up waiting for food and a sense of community has been built around their food distribution days. PCAF now uses a self-select model and is able to provide more nutritious food to guests with strict dietary needs.