

Delaware County

Food Pantry Takes Steps to Encourage Healthier Eating

Challenge

In the 2021 Delaware County Community Health Assessment (CHA), 83% of adults with incomes under \$50,000 had overweight or obesity. Poor diet contributes to obesity, and limited budgets and access to healthy food options often impact food choices. The CDC's PLACES dataset reveals that 15.7% of adults living in the 105.30 census tract in the City of Delaware experienced food insecurity in 2022. Additionally, multiple food pantry organizations in the county have reported a steady increase in the amount of new, unduplicated clients using their services each year since 2020. Fortunately, the Healthy Eating Research Guidelines for the Charitable Food System indicates that food pantries play a crucial role in helping those facing food insecurity make healthier choices through prioritizing and offering nutritious foods.

Approach

The Delaware Public Health District (DPHD) and the United Way of Delaware County's Family Resource Center (FRC) collaborated on a Healthy Food Pantry project, beginning with a pre-assessment using the Healthy Food Pantry Assessment Tool (HFPAT). This tool provides a score from 1 to 100, highlighting areas to modify, like new policies and changes the physical pantry environment. The FRC's initial score was 49/100. We then engaged young people who frequently visit the Willis Education Center where the FRC Pantry is located in a taste test event to provide feedback on lower sugar or high sugar fruits and other food items that would be desired in the Pantry. After the pre-assessment and youth engagement activities we then identified key strategies to boost the HFPAT score and diversify the food offerings.

Results

Strategies selected included enhancing pantry visibility with new welcome signs, providing information displaying nutritional benefits of food items, new shelving, can organizers to ensure food beyond expiration is distributed first, and acquiring a glass door refrigerator for being able to keep a wider variety of food and perishables like produce, dairy, and proteins. The FRC staff were trained on using the Supporting Wellness At Pantries (SWAP) toolkit to categorize foods items and use of related 'nudges' encouraging them to be chosen often, sometimes, or rarely. A policy aimed to ensure 75% of purchased items will meet the choose often or sometimes guidelines was also adopted. The HFPAT was conducted again after the changes, and found the score increased 17 points for a final score of 66/100.



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