Strengthening Food Security Initiatives Through Trauma-Informed Strategies: Lessons learned from the Nutrition Pantry Program

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WE ENVISION nourished communities and a healthy, equitable food system.

OUR MISSION is to improve the health, wellness, and resilience of communities through trauma-informed nutrition security.
... because everyone deserves nourishing meals every day.
Agenda

1. Trauma Basics
2. A Trauma-Informed Approach
3. Nutrition Pantry Program Overview
4. Example Implementation Strategies
5. Next Steps
Trauma Basics
Food is...
I'm in a relationship with food...
...and it's complicated.
3 Realms of ACEs

1. Household
   - divorce
   - homelessness
   - mental illness
   - drug abuse
   - alcoholism
   - domestic violence
   - depression
   - neglect
   - bullying
   - incarceration

2. Community
   - lack of access to nourishment
   - history of trauma
   - substandard housing
   - violence
   - poverty
   - lack of jobs
   - violence
   - poor water and air quality
   - lack of social capital and mobility
   - substandard school

3. Environment
   - climate crisis
   - record heat and droughts
   - wildfires and smoke
   - record storms, flooding, and mudslides
   - sea level rise
   - natural disasters
   - tornadoes and hurricanes
   - volcanic eruptions and tsunamis
   - earthquakes
Implications for Nutritional Health

How trauma can influence health and well-being

Adverse Experiences

- Disrupted Neurobiology
  - Damaged metabolism
  - Increased body fat
  - Inflammation
  - Gut-brain circuitry

Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Impairment

- Adoption of health-risk behaviors
  - Emotional eating
  - Lack of sleep
  - High fat/high sugar cravings
  - Decreased self-regulation
  - Feast or famine mindset

Disease, Disability, and Social Problems

- Obesity
  - Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease

Early Death

- How trauma can influence health and well-being
Two Considerations

1. Trauma of any kind can cause disruption in a healthy relationship with food

2. Food itself can be a source of trauma, which begins or exacerbates an unhealthy relationship with food

Therefore, the relationship between food, individuals, families, and communities must be treated with care and a holistic perspective
A Trauma-Informed Approach to Food Pantries
Building Trauma-Informed Food and Nutrition Programs

- Autonomy & Competency: Cooking skills and food literacy
- Self Regulation: Mindful and self-aware eating
- Nourishing Others: Cooking for and feeding family and community
- Justice & Equity: Recognizing the impact of social and economic systems
- Identity & Self Expression: Sharing food memories, telling stories, and honoring heritage
- Positive Experiences: Enjoyment, gratitude, and sensory experiences with food
- Supportive Relationships: Foster relationships by cooking and eating together
- Physical & Mental Health: Good nutrition for a healthy body and mind
- Safety & Security: Trauma-informed engagement; reliable, desirable, and dignified food resources
Safety & Security
Trauma informed engagement; reliable, desirable, and dignified food resources

- Safety
- Reliability
- Trustworthiness
- Transparency
- Desirable, dignified food

- Physical safety
- Welcoming, emotionally safe
- Consistency in hours, volunteers, service
- Openness and fairness in policies & procedures
- Clear communication of changes
- Client input
Implications for Food Distributions

Does the food distribution:
  - reduce shame, anxiety, confusion and tension?
  - promote safety, dignity, joy?
  - inspire healing and a healthy relationship to food?
Prioritize

- Client dignity, voice and needs
- Stress reduction
- Choice and autonomy
- Food in support of mental and physical health
- Culturally-relevant and accessible resources
- Leveling of power dynamics in interactions

(adapted from SAMHSA’s Principles of Trauma Informed Care)
Barriers to Trauma-Informed Food Security

➢ Rules, restriction, deprivation or scarcity mindset
➢ Disregard of client readiness
➢ Lack of cultural humility
➢ Bureaucratic and non-transparent processes
➢ “Donation dumping”; poor quality resources
Nutrition Pantry Program
Overview
Our Mission: Building, supporting, and certifying a network of client-centered, health-focused food distributions.
Wherever free food is provided to communities experiencing nutrition insecurity:

- the distribution is dignified and reflective of client needs
- the food is nourishing and appropriate
- clients feel confident preparing and consuming these healthier foods
- pantry leadership considers the role of their distribution in the community
NPP: A Layered Program

Tailor food distribution to students
Statewide Connections
Inform institutional nutrition security initiatives
Connect & coordinate with campus and off-campus partners
Tailor food distribution to students

NPP: A Layered Program
NPP: A Layered Program

1. Tailor food distribution to students
2. Connect & coordinate with campus and off-campus partners
3. Inform institutional nutrition security initiatives
Statewide Connections

Inform institutional nutrition security initiatives

Connect & coordinate with campus and off-campus partners

Tailor food distribution to students

NPP: A Layered Program

Nutrition Pantry Program
PSE Intervention with Six Focus Areas

Environment

Nutrition Education

Inventory & Purchasing

I’m nourished. I’m seen. I’m heard. I matter.

Cultural & Dietary Accommodations

Community Connections

Pantry Policies & Procedures
What do your Clients Need?

Jar = All Client Needs

Marbles = Needs the Pantry Meets

Space = The "gap" that needs to be filled
Living (and cooking) situations vary:

- Sheltered, full kitchen
- Sheltered, limited kitchen
- Shared cooking and living spaces
- Unsheltered
- Away from home at meal times
- On vs. off campus
- Access to transportation
Example Implementation

Strategies
Nutrition Education
Clients, staff, and volunteers have access to nutrition and culinary education
Inventory & Purchasing
Healthy foods are prioritized for distribution. Pantries support a variety of waste reduction efforts.
Cultural & Dietary Accommodations

People of different backgrounds have access to food and information that fits their preferences and health needs.
Environment
Clients are warmly welcomed and healthy options are easy to access
Community Connections
Pantries connect and collaborate with the community.
Pantry Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures are documented and align with a commitment to a dignified, healthy distribution.
PROCESS

- Planning
- Needs Assessment
- Implementation
- Certification, Graduation
- Maintenance
Benefits of Participation

- Network of certified pantries
- Recognition in the community
- Leadership Opportunities
- Motivation and alignment within organization
- Cutting edge thinking around trauma & nourishment
- Add in grant proposals / donations
NPP as a Network

- Support CalFresh and other government agencies
- Support Food Pantry and Food Bank Community
- Focus Area Super Stars & Graduated Pantries
- Silver Certified Pantries
- Gold Certified Pantries
- Support and Innovation

- Trauma Informed Partners
- Food Waste Reduction Partners
- Nutrition Education Partners
- Food Access Partners
- Food as Medicine Partners
- NPP Ambassadors
Next Steps
Reflections on Your Work

- How do I currently incorporate trauma-informed/healing-centered practices in my food and nutrition programming?

- How could understanding trauma and stress lead to changes in my food and nutrition program?

- What challenges can I anticipate with implementing programming changes?
Questions
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