

# Cooking Up Community:

## Nutrition Education in Emergency Food Programs

### Executive Summary

Across the country, individuals and organizations are working tirelessly to tackle the issues of food insecurity within their communities. However, their stories often go unmentioned or untold. The challenges they face, whether funding or staffing, constantly jeopardize the success of their programs—and more so, the health of their communities. Therefore, WhyHunger's National Hunger Clearinghouse has embarked on a research endeavor to share these stories.

Specifically, this research looks into the developing role of emergency food providers in providing nutrition intervention. While perhaps a non-traditional setting for nutrition education, EFPs demonstrate a venue where innovation joins community action. Therefore, *Cooking Up Community: Nutrition Education in Emergency Programs* draws together one year of research by WhyHunger's National Hunger Clearinghouse, exploring the breadth and magnitude of current nutrition education programming that can be sources of information and collaboration for emergency food programs. Overall, this resource attempts to:

- (1) Share and provide information about current and innovative programming regarding nutrition education.
- (2) Demonstrate the current wealth of resources and materials that are available.
- (3) Emphasize the need to utilize and share resources.
- (4) Facilitate the incorporation of nutrition education and food education activities into emergency food programs.

Drawn from interviews, questionnaires, and literature reviews, this guide briefly covers topics such as experiential learning activities/programs, curricula, health education and health promotion, cultural competency, evaluation, and challenges in nutrition education programming. Additionally, the organizations interviewed represent a wide variety of programming that implement elements of nutrition education while also tackling issues of food insecurity and factors affecting their communities' ability to access and utilize healthy food options. Some organizations highlighted work with urban rooftop gardens, family cooking curricula, culturally relevant and appropriate recipes, college campuses, HIV/AIDS communities, youth, and even media production.

Challenges to expanding and implementing nutrition education through EFP sites were also revealed. For example, from these interviews, it was notably observed that regardless of organization size, funding acted as the greatest obstacle in programming. Additionally, concerns also centered on vetting partnerships, personnel retention, volunteer management, participant and community engagement, measuring impact, and maintaining quality of services.

Overall, this research demonstrated that a large quantity of information on nutrition education programming could be found through the voices and anecdotes of program coordinators, chefs, CEOs, community leaders, and volunteers. While each organization has different goals and objectives, it was evident that all those interviewed demonstrated an unflinching commitment to improve the health and wellbeing of their community. For that reason, this resource is not meant to be a comprehensive document, but is the first of many capacity building guides to bridge and connect different community-based organizations, share information, and further support the individuals that are making an impact. It is our hope to continue this work through collaboration.



The full report is available at [www.whyhunger.org/cookingupcommunity](http://www.whyhunger.org/cookingupcommunity).

