

Sabrina Sakhai  
R/C CLIF  
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### Veggie Rx Program: Final Report

Working on the projects involved in my fellowship this semester involved lots of turns and changes - both in obstacles and successful milestones. The initial focus of the project was widened, adapted, and in many ways postponed, while the semester was spent engaging in a variety of other related activities. As a constant, my focus has always remained on addressing the intersection between food justice, food access, culture, and health.

As I had proposed in the application, a produce prescription program meets the needs of food insecure individuals with chronic health conditions. Certain diseases, such as hypertension or diabetes, are diet rooted rather than biologically caused. As such, there has been a strong association found between those who experience food insecurity and those who have these chronic diseases. Rather than solely treating these diseases with medicine, it is imperative that we treat the root cause of the issue and address the access to healthy foods. Implementing a produce prescription in Waltham successfully allows members of the community to take control of their health conditions by providing them with access to produce. A doctor at Charles River Health Center selected 10 households that will receive the produce for free from Waltham Fields Community Farm. These households are mostly immigrants, and all deal with chronic health conditions and food insecurity. Furthermore, and more specific to my role as well, I wanted to assure that we give each individual and family the ability / know how to use each produce item rather than simply giving them a box with them. This will be just as essential, as many in the community have spoken as well about the unfamiliarity surrounding the provided produce due to cultural differences.

While I had believed I'd be able to engage more productively with this part of my fellowship throughout the semester, I was unable to do so. The actual distribution of the program will not begin until June. I thought that I would still be able to collaborate more with both Waltham Fields Community Farm (my community partner) and Charles River Health Center throughout the semester, but I couldn't because both organizations were engaged more fully in other responsibilities that were currently going on. Starting mainly in April is when I began to really meet more with them and discuss how we would like the recipes and educational materials to be, and discuss other thoughts regarding the program as a whole.

Throughout the semester, I kept engaged in matters related to food access and health. I wanted to utilize the resources that I had to be most helpful to Brandeis and the Waltham community. This involved meeting with lots of different organizations, learning more about Waltham, and bringing back all that I learned to Brandeis and other students. As a coordinator for Hospital Helpers (now Advocates 4 Health), I incorporated a new initiative that we began with Healthy Waltham. We had three volunteer opportunities throughout the semester where we gathered to cook a healthy, low budget, and multicultural recipe tutorial. We filmed it, edited it, and send it to Healthy Waltham for them to use in their media as a resource for the Waltham community. Additionally, I hosted a Webinar featuring four different community organizations - Healthy Waltham, Daniel's Table, Food Not Bombs, and Waltham Fields Community Farm. Each organization shared more about the work they do and their initiatives involving health / food access, while also having a discussion about the food system and how we can work to change it. There were 16 attendees, and I received positive feedback from some classmates who had attended. I lastly also did a fundraiser for the farm on campus where I sold "Sabrina's Granola," and raised nearly \$100 to go directly to the food access initiatives that the farm has.

Because the actual produce prescription program will not begin until June, I have not yet been able to assess the impact of this program. However, I am planning on working with Charles River Health Center and the farm in the upcoming months to assess both the impact of the recipes and the health impact of the program as a whole.

The main challenges that I faced were centered around the timeline, the lack of assessment opportunities, the lack of structure, and to some extent the student engagement. As mentioned, it had been difficult to stick to the timeline because of reliance on the other work that both the farm and the health center are focused on. Consequently, it has been just as difficult to receive feedback on the recipes that I create until recently and even more so until the program begins. Also due to the timeline changing and what I am able to engage in changing, the project became more broad. At times, and especially in the beginning, it was difficult to remain focused. Sticking to the goal and the broader mission definitely helped with this, though. Lastly, I tried to form some partnerships that didn't pan out such as engaging with the ICC. However, other partnerships did prove to be successful and helpful such as collaborating with both another R/C CLIF member and a staff of DCS, as well as students for translating the recipes.

Despite setbacks, I learned a lot throughout the process in both logistical ways and in respect to personal development. When putting together the Webinar, I learned so much about marketing, outreach, and networking. I no longer see it as a scary thing and feel unsure about talking to organizations, and coordinating planning. Throughout engaging with the community, I learned so much about Waltham needs and organizations that are working to address those needs. I learned more about food justice approaches, and how community organizations can play a role in community health. I learned about holding myself accountable, and understanding that starting engagement with one thing can oftentimes lead to another. Meeting with more than five different

organizations and having conversations with other Brandeis students really led to tangible results, and also led to intangible lessons learned throughout the process.

As for next steps, I look forward to really engaging with the produce prescription program more. There are currently tens of recipes / educational resources made about the produce. More will continue to be made as the summer progresses and as we get feedback into hearing what is helpful. The program will itself begin in early June. Throughout the summer, I am hoping to also do live cooking demos with the families that were selected, gain recipe feedback, get the recipes translated into Spanish, and assess the impact of the recipes through talks with the participants. I will also be continuing a food justice / food access component in Advocates for Health.

Though I certainly faced unexpected challenges and obstacles along the way, this fellowship experience allowed me to learn more about myself, the community, and will continue to allow me to engage productively with the Waltham community and contribute in allowing them to live healthier lives.