

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE!

EXPLORING FOOD BANKS AS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR RURAL LATINO FAMILIES, AND FOOD BANK USERS IN GENERAL IN RURAL COLORADO




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Food Banks and Mental Health in Rural Colorado




- **Food insecurity affects one in 11 Coloradans**, including one in nine children (Feeding America, 2021).
- Some of the communities are known as food deserts which means these are neighborhoods who face challenges in accessing affordable, nutritious, fresh produce within a mile of where they live.
- Food-insecure families often face a cluster of health-related barriers and needs, including those related to mental wellbeing (Middleton et al. 2018; Nagata et al., 2019; Palar et al., 2018).
- Rural residents experience disparities in access to mental health services, with an average of only 1 provider per 6,008 residents (Colorado Health Foundation, 2016).

Community Food Banks can be a significant resource in alleviating the stress of access to healthy foods, **this project explores the potential of community food banks as mental health support models.**

What can peer-led mental health support programs do?

-  Recognize the signs of mental health needs
-  Provide compassionate support in the moment
-  Facilitate connection to further professional support

Internship Goals and Application

-  Further the understanding of the cultural and social navigation of Hispanic families facing food insecurity around mental health supports
-  Identify gaps in care or services and inform practitioners on how to better serve Hispanic families' behavioral health needs
-  Inform the expansion the services and resources provided by Food Banks to food insecure Hispanic families in Northwestern Colorado

Re:Vision Co-op: Supporting Southeast Denver

Re:Vision is an organization whose aim is rethinking development for communities impacted by social inequalities through their food systems.

- It uses food as an entree into community self-sufficiency via an urban agriculture model, hiring and training community members to lead their food-based programs.
- Their programs include a no cost grocery; urban agriculture and gardens and promotoras trained to urban agriculture and healthy living to share information with the community.
- Re:Vision has identified how food insecurity can lead to distress and contribute to mental health difficulties, which can exacerbate existing health disparities in that community.
- Promotoras are trained in mental health peer support to promote a culture of positive mental health among the Re:Vision community.



A fair and just food system should also guarantee people the right to well-being and mental health in which people don't suffer trauma from their food insecurity experiences, and has the resources to provide timely attention to people that are experiencing mental distress due to their food access and food experiences difficulties

Internship products

Research methodology and protocols

- Protocol submitted to the Institutional board, and its approval
- Consent form, survey, survey flyers and interview guide
- Visit to Re:Vision Food Bank project in Denver; a Latine serving food coop with a program in trauma informed services
- Final project report

If you are a regular user of your local Food Bank Please help us by responding this survey



Key learnings, intakes and challenges

Learnings and intakes:

- Opportunities to include mental health is a key aspect of food systems and food justice but they must be approached carefully.
- Peer-led mental health support programs are a possible way to support underserved communities.
- Food Banks are interested in mental health supportive topics such as trauma informed care, de-escalation practices, and peer mental health support.
- The connection between food insecurity and mental health is complex: due to the already intense work done by Food Banks in providing food access to the community, Food Banks are hesitant to take too much involvement in mental health support than what they can handle.
- It is important to engage community partners and their feedback.

Personal growth

- Improved my skills using Qualtrics and Canva.
- Learned how to frame survey questions about mental health .

Challenges and limitations

- Tight deadline to submit a proposal to IRB process and be able to fulfill all the requirements on a timely manner
- Building a survey is time intensive and a slow process, producing the question, taking the input of different professionals; therefore, planning, flexibility, and perseverance were critical
- Leaving the distribution of the flyers to a third party makes the response process very slow, we cannot control how Food Bank users are being motivated to participate.
- Not being able to send out the survey earlier during the summer made it difficult to recruit participants for follow up interviews.
- Food Bank partners have suggested that reading the consent form at the beginning of the survey is a burden that overwhelms participants, making them less willing to continue responding the survey

Next Steps

- 1) Increase the survey's response rate and develop a list of participants for future interviews.
- 2) Incorporate feedback on the survey from Re:Vision and other community partners.
- 3) Analyze the survey responses to identify the main results about the relationship between perceptions and access to mental health services in a food insecure context.
- 4) Use the results to inform the peer-led training to Food Banks through a grant from Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute, CU Anschutz.
- 5) Continue practicing collaborative work on my personal and academic projects.