

100 COMMUNITY FOODIES- PEER EDUCATORS ADDRESSING NUTRITION INEQUITIES

The Community Foodies project aims to increase the access for marginal groups (particularly low income and aboriginal groups) to nutrition information and skills via a peer education model. It also provides a pathway to further education and employment for peer educators.

The project offers free training (24 hours) on basic nutrition and community education skills. Once graduated Foodies work with health workers to promote and advocate for healthy eating. This presentation will focus on how this project appears to be working toward addressing nutrition inequities for urban Indigenous communities. Five Indigenous women have trained as Community Foodies and one of these women will tell her story of how Foodies has impacted on her own experience of inequities. The main outcomes for this Foodie as with many others are 1) dietary changes leading to positive health outcomes such as an increase in birth weight of her second child and longer breast feeding, 2) increased personal empowerment, with this Foodie completing her schooling and now being employed with the Department of Education and Children Services.

Evidence gathered from a multi method approach, (using quantitative, qualitative and realist approaches) shows that the project is reaching low socioeconomic groups with 65 % (N= 33) of participants (N= 51) of Foodie programs, with an income less than \$25000 per annum. Also 59% (N =35) of participants of Foodie programs (N= 59) had not previously attended a cooking/nutrition program, which indicates an extension of reach to new target groups. Interestingly those on low incomes (under \$25000 pa) benefited more in relation to the number of serves of fruit and vegetables eaten per day and in their sense of self esteem. This is a particularly important finding because experience in some health promotion programs (for example, quitting smoking) has shown that the less disadvantaged tend to benefit more than the disadvantaged, resulting in a widening health gap. In this program, there is some evidence that the disadvantaged have benefited more than the less disadvantaged.

Since intersectoral partnerships are an important principle of the project the evaluation is also investigating whether auspicing and partner agencies of the project consider Community Foodies are enabling them to reach marginal groups, and additionally achieve their strategic plans.

This project is thus showing early evidence of addressing nutritional inequities for marginal groups. It appears at this stage that the key to its success is the peer approach with the project model going further than education and skills to address poverty by providing a pathway to further education and employment.

The project's transferability to other situations would be dependent on ensuring that the project is grounded in the community, such that it works with and alongside the community. Adequate time and resources to comprehensively implement a community development process and continually support and increase the skills of workers is also critical to its success.