

## *Ardmore Institute of Health*

### **Report Abstract for Awarded Grant**

#### Organization Name

Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma

#### Project Title

Fresh Rx Program

#### Amount Awarded

\$70,547

#### Project Start Date

October 2015

#### Project End Date

January 2017

#### Number of People Impacted

1,251 food-insecure Oklahomans

#### Project Overview

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma's Fresh Rx Initiative is a strategic effort to improve health outcomes for low-income, high-risk Oklahomans. Fresh Rx, branded as a food prescription program, aims to improve health by increasing access to fresh produce for patients with chronic disease. Food prescription falls within the category of social prescription, which is a practice that involves primary healthcare professionals referring their patients to non-medical sources of support. Fresh Rx combines healthy food distribution with nutrition education and recipe cards.

#### Results

**Clients Served:** Between April and September 2017, the pantry served 479 households or 1,251 people. More than 52% of clients served primarily spoke Spanish.

**Nutrition:** One of our goals with the Fresh Rx Initiative is to improve the nutritious foods individuals can access and also increase nutrition knowledge. We accomplish this through recipe cards and through our partnership with Variety Care's dietician. Some of the comments we received included:

“The patients really use recipe cards!” – Variety Care registered dietician

“Today I was able to help a family who has 8 in their apartment – provided 1 fresh food bag and 1 pantry box. They were so grateful and we even taught them how to cook Brussel sprouts – an item they’d never had!” – Variety Care registered dietician

Patients’ Attitudes: The program analyses, which included client surveys, revealed clients were food insecure and needed additional resources:

- 59% of patients put off buying food in the last 12 months in order to have enough money to pay for medicine.
- 52% of patients put off buying medicine or taking medicine in the last 12 months so that they would have more money for food.
- 60% of patients asked a Variety Care staff member to contact them to discuss additional needs and resources.

The Fresh Rx pantry helped social service staff identify patients who needed additional services which helped to close additional gaps in services for these clients.

### Use of Funds

Generous support from the Ardmore Institute of Health was used to purchase food and fresh produce, provide food storage equipment, and subsidize transportation and mileage costs associated with food delivery.

### Key Challenges

Pantry capacity: There was only one closet available to serve as the pantry which dictated how much food could be stored and therefore how many people could be served. The patients typically received 4-5 produce items and one Healthy Living Pantry Box. After trial and error, we designed the program to serve 20 people a week.

On-Site staffing: The pantry did not have set hours, since it was based on a referral system. In the beginning, Variety Care did not have enough staff members to adequately address the lack of predictability of referrals. Additional staff at Variety Care were trained to be able to manage the food distribution.

Client tracking: One of our goals was to track the number of individuals who visited a food pantry after they received a referral. We experienced two challenges with tracking. One, we only had the name of one person in the household and that person may not have visited the food pantry but their family member did. Secondly, not all of

our pantries use OASIS (our client management system), so if they visited a pantry that did not have OASIS then we could not track them.

## Key Learnings

In order to better refine the Fresh Rx model and identify potential challenges to client participation, the Regional Food Bank conducted a detailed program analysis that included surveys with Food Bank staff, clients and Variety Care staff. The recommendations from this analysis included:

- **Diverse and Innovative Implementation Group:** Bring together a diverse group of individuals from both the health clinic and the Regional Food Bank to lead partnership building and determine how the referral from health clinic to food bank will work. This implementation group should be multidisciplinary with a range of perspectives represented.
- **Education:** The Regional Food Bank should design and host a training for clinicians to educate them on food insecurity in Oklahoma, how to conduct food security screenings and how to provide patients information on accessing food assistance resources. The education session for clinicians is intended to motivate clinicians to screen for food insecurity and feel confident in providing resources for their patients that have a positive screen.
- **Clear Eligibility Criteria:** Determine exact criteria for Fresh Rx program eligibility so screening and referring patients to the program or other food assistance resources is clearly defined for the physicians/referral specialists.
- **Tracking Referrals:** Track referrals to determine the success of improvements to the partnership and referral process.

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