

HEALTHY EATING ACTIVE LIVING

# FOOD SYSTEM PARTNERS

STORIES OF SUCCESS / YEAR 3



## PROJECT PURPOSE:

To develop a community-based model of integration leveraging the strengths of numerous existing food systems programs whose primary mission is to improve the emergency food system by increasing healthy food access, advancing community education, and creating agricultural and community development opportunities using existing services and programs.

## 3 Project Objectives:

**Objective 1:** Increase Healthy Food Access

**Objective 2:** Advancing Community Education

**Objective 3:** Creating Economic, Community and Agricultural Development Opportunities

**HEAL: Food System Partners have 5 established teams who work at achieving the 3 project objectives.**

**Team 1:** Increasing Access

**Team 2:** Nutrition Education

**Team 3:** Family Stabilization

**Team 4:** Food Policy

**Team 5:** Pantry Technical Assistance



# TEAM 1 - Increasing Access

## Food Pantry Network

Food Pantry Network - HOI serves the community by providing Emergent Food Deliveries & Food Resource Info

As COVID continued to shed a light on some of our unique barriers to food, a couple of initiatives from Food Pantry Network - HOI were pursued including one-time emergent food deliveries and education for the public on where food is available. To address these needs, we began to respond to community partner referrals. We also joined IRIS or the Integrated Referral and Intake System for Tazewell, Peoria, and Woodford County.

In year 3 of the HEAL-FSP grant, Food Pantry Network - HOI continued to grow its network and referrals response. Between April of 2021-March of 2022, the Network completed: 89 one-time, emergent food deliveries and 114 referrals for food resource information (including zip code specific lists developed by Food Pantry Network - HOI in both English & Spanish, the Find Food IL Resource, SNAP outreach and other food resources relevant to each situation).

To complete emergent food deliveries - we utilize our listserv of volunteers and Food Pantry Network - HOI members - to coordinate food and delivery. Many times this is completed extremely quickly, from minutes to hours later, addressing a crisis in real-time for our community.



“ Over 37,000 people in our tri-county area lack access to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life. The three most requested items from families are dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins. ~Shanita Wallace ”

# TEAM 2 - Nutrition Education

## Greenlight at St Paul's Episcopal Church

Food pantries serve as an essential asset in our community, providing both food and essential household and hygiene products to families in need. St. Paul's Episcopal Church food pantry in Peoria goes above and beyond to ensure nutritious food is offered and pantry guests' needs are met. The pantry has done so by implementing a "shopping style" layout, adopting a nutrition policy, and adding new signage.

Even with the challenges of the pandemic, St. Paul's food pantry transitioned to a "shopping style" or client choice model at their pantry. Shoppers can shop through the pantry similar to a grocery store, choosing the items that best meet their needs. Each person in line is given a personalized shopping time to maintain distancing and retain dignity in choosing the foods for their family.

"Shopping style or client choice is one way for a pantry to give their guests control over what foods they will take home to their families," explained Rebecca Crumrine, "This style offers an opportunity to interact more, talk to guests about their food & health needs and cuts down on food waste."

After meeting through Food Pantry Network—HOI with the University of Illinois Extension SNAP-Ed, the manager of the pantry, Emily Waite, began working in the pantry together.

Emily attended a nutrition policy training co-hosted by SNAP-Ed in April 2021 and created a nutrition policy with the help of church leadership, adopting the policy in the fall of 2021.

During this time, Kaitlyn and Rebecca worked with Emily to help bring new nutrition signage and education to the pantry environment, enhancing the guest's experience & adding healthy messaging to help guests make healthier choices.

In addition to these changes, the pantry adopted the Greenlight labeling system. This system uses stickers and signage to identify healthier foods as healthier food choices to manage chronic diseases. With this labeling, guests are able to easily identify nutritious options to support their family's health.

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## Continued...Greenlight at St Paul's Episcopal Church

"Food insecure communities often rely on food pantries to help meet their family's needs," states Kaitlyn Streitmatter, "The traditional, non-perishable items often found in pantries can help provide food to those in need; however, we know that some of these items are not going to be the best choices for general health or those dealing with diet-related chronic diseases, such as hypertension or diabetes."

If you are interested in learning more about the Greenlight Project, check out a video featuring St Paul's Pantry here: [go.illinois.edu/greenlight](http://go.illinois.edu/greenlight).



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~Kaitlyn Streitmatter”

## Team 3: Family Sustainability

### HEALTHY CENTS

Through team 3 working together and leadership provided by SNAP-Ed - we made a goal to hold Healthy Cents adult nutrition classes as a way to help provide adult education for family budgeting with a nutrition focus. The nutrition series offered is 12 lessons long and offered at 3 different times virtually with a total of 36 sessions as well as offered 77 individual class sessions in person. Through these 113 classes, we had a total of 237 adults in attendance across these sessions (replication of adults included in number).

Through the grant, participants also can receive \$25 for each set of four unique classes attended.

## Continued...Healthy Cents

Classes were marketed through local food pantries and organizations serving SNAP-eligible populations.

To continue to make the greatest impact on our neighbors in need, our collaboration and relationships with local partners have been extremely important. By utilizing these connections, we had the opportunity to continue offering our adult curriculum, Healthy Cents, that reaches a priority adult population for our area. Healthy Cents combines nutrition and food resource management to help families make healthier food choices on a limited budget. Participants of our Healthy Cents series have enjoyed getting to learn and being in a community with other adults. Through the collaboration of HEAL - Food System Partners, the benefits for families participating in the Healthy Cents series were multiplied.

Some of the series benefits for participants are as follows:

- Join interactive, fun, free classes filled with great information
  - Classes provided by SNAP-Education
- Choose a class time & location that best fits into their schedule
  - Offered both virtual & in-person
- \$25 in grocery money for every 4 unique classes attended
  - Purchasing and distribution are handled by Tazewell County Health Department
    - up to \$75 per household
- Surveys were used to gain feedback on more free classes
  - Free personal finance & nutrition & wellness class series scheduled based on results

Through adding in both in-person and virtual options, we managed to multiply our efforts in adult nutrition education as a unit. We also approached the opportunity as a team to create the greatest impact we could.

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“We had many participants reach out after the program to express how much they enjoyed the class and thank us, but one participant stuck out. She explained to us how difficult it is for her to find recipes she enjoys making and eating while living with diabetes. She wanted us to know that the program has inspired her to work harder on meal planning and that the recipes we provided were delicious and worked well with her particular diet. She is looking forward to joining us in future programs and continuing to use the education we provide in her everyday life. The participant was already working on her meal plan for the coming week when she reached out.”

~SNAP Ed Staff

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# Team 4: Food policy

## Nutrition Policy Training

After surveying food pantries affiliated with Midwest Food Bank and Peoria Area Food Bank, 168 food pantry staff/volunteers responded. Additionally, the survey was distributed to 418 food pantry guests in both Spanish and English.

Food pantry staff and recipients identified and requested lean meats, fruits, and vegetables along with healthy food recipes as the most helpful options to improve access to and intake of healthier foods. With this information, the SNAP-Ed team partnered with the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI), Midwest Food Bank, and Peoria Area Food Bank to offer 3 90-minute nutrition policy trainings.

With 77 food pantry leaders and volunteers participating, the team presented on Midwest Food Bank and Peoria Area Food Bank's plans for adopting a nutrition policy at the food bank. Both food banks expressed the importance of hunger and health. Midwest Food Bank is striving to procure additional produce locally while Peoria Area Food Bank is prioritizing healthier commodity options. Both food banks have partnered with Food Pantry Network, led by SNAP-Ed, to distribute mobile food boxes in areas of the community with minimal access to fresh food. Such efforts were highlighted at the training bringing awareness to food pantry partners and volunteers.

Additionally, IPHI and SNAP-Ed provide 45-minute nutrition policy training on how to write and implement a nutrition policy. Attendees were provided UIE templates to start writing their nutrition policy. After the training 17 pantries expressed interest in receiving one on one assistance to help implement their nutrition policies.

Evaluations expressed pantries' interest in nutrition policy and their appreciation for training. The team plans to host additional trainings and continue to advocate for additional strategies to procure healthy shelf-stable foods and fresh foods.



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*Thank you for helping us write a nutrition policy! we are excited to be able to offer healthy food to our students!*  
-Limestone Moms Who Care  
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# TEAM 5 - Pantry Technical Assistance

## Food Pantry Needs Assessment

There were 105 responses from agencies in all 3 tri-counties (Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford) as well as other counties such as Fulton, Knox, Mason, and Stark. The purpose of the assessment was to recognize what activities the agency conducts at their food pantry, training offered to the volunteers, and potential needs for the pantries.

Food pantries reported storing and distributing shelf stable and temperature-controlled products, repackaging bulk foods, and a few organizations are preparing meals. 88% of pantries reported having enough refrigeration to store temperature-controlled foods.

Food pantries frequently utilize volunteers for their operations.

According to the assessment, most pantries provide food safety training to their volunteers via in-person, videos, and handouts. Topics include:

- Hygiene - handwashing, clothing, and sick policies
- Sanitation - Cleaning, sanitizing equipment, glove/tong usage
- Food Safety - Accepting/Rejecting food, inspecting packages, sell by dates, labeling, temperatures

The final question of the assessment offered food pantries an opportunity to express any needs for their operations. The information collected will be used to seek opportunities to purchase additional supplies and equipment via grant funding, donations, etc. As a result of our Food Pantry Needs Assessment, Team 5 is proud to share a success story:

***In November, HEAL chairs were approached by First Federated Church with an opportunity for pantries to receive new appliances through their Christmas Catalog program. Pantries needing refrigeration were identified through the need assessment results and 4 refrigerators were received by Hand Up Peoria, Hidden Manna, and St. Vincent De Paul-Pekin. Thank you, First Federated Church!***

“I’m so excited about this collaboration to deliver this important information. Thank you!!!!”  
~Monica Scheuer”

