



Hartford Youth Program

Program Description:

This program was a collaboration between Healing Meals Community Project, The Hispanic Health Council in the Frog Hollow neighborhood of Hartford, and Forge Cityworks also in Frog Hollow.

Ten high school-aged youth were chosen by the Hispanic Health Council from their youth intern program to participate in the Healing Meals Hartford Youth Program. The youth met Healing Meals staff at the Forge Cityworks training kitchen for an afternoon, once weekly for ten weeks. During these sessions, the youth and Healing Meals team would be with a connection circle where we would discuss the plan for the session and also chat about our week. Then we would wash up and cook together, followed by a community meal where we would sit around a table and eat while discussing wellness and nutrition topics as well as sharing favorite family recipes. At the end of the session, each youth received a double serving family meal bag from Healing Meals to bring home to their families. During one of the sessions, we invited the youth's parents to join. This was an especially engaging time to have the parents participate in the programming with their children. The sessions were generally boisterous and full of activity and the youth were able to try foods they had never tried before, including many different vegetables that were highlighted in the meals. The meals were generally of Latin cuisine to make the experience more culturally relevant.

Program Evaluation:

The pre/post surveys showed a small change because the program was limited to 10 weeks. Here are the pre/post survey changes noted:

There was not a tangible different in eating habits but we did note an increase in a couple of questions specifically:

- I understand the impact of my eating habits on my physical health.
- I am confident I can cook a meal from scratch.

My sense is if the program was longer, we would see an even greater impact.

Goals Met:

The program was remarkable all in all. Our goals for the program included: learning about the community to help prepare us for a future Hartford based youth program that makes healthy meals for families in crisis; engaging with the youth on wellness and nutrition education topics; teaching life skills and culinary skills to the youth; connecting as a community over food. These goals were all met.