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Menu Planning and Grocery Shopping for People Living with Psychiatric Disabilities

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INTRODUCTION

• The HowardCenter in Burlington, Vermont is designed to empower and improve the lives of individuals with mental illness throughout Chittenden County.

• People living with chronic psychiatric disabilities have higher mortality rates and earlier onset of medical illness... It has been observed that many of the risk factors for chronic conditions revolve around nutrition, implying a chance to intervene.

• Understanding the various ways people with psychiatric disabilities eat, buy, cook, and value a healthy diet is fundamental for the HowardCenter to address increased mortality in this population.

• Our goal is to identify barriers and develop a resource to improve nutrition in this population.

METHODS

• Literature review and research assessed the problem and examined evidence based interventions that could aid our resource development.

• Research and information was collected from HowardCenter clients with the permission of UVM College of Medicine and associated healthcare providers.

• The survey assessed the population’s available finances, knowledge of nutrition, and willingness to change current habits. Key questions included:
  - What do you think eating healthy means?
  - How much money do you spend on food every week?
  - What problems keep you from eating more healthy foods?
  - What cooking appliances do you have access to?

• The survey was administered on paper at the HowardCenter and Lakeview House. Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

• 34 surveys were collected from a population of 650 clients of HowardCenter's Community Support Program (~5% of the total group).

• The survey showed that the majority (92%, 31/34) want to eat healthier. However, the majority (82%) also had difficulty finding the time, energy, or money to do so.

• The survey results identified several barriers to cooking and eating healthy such as finances and meal time preparation. Based on the needs and desires of this population, we created a resource titled, Cooking with Wholesome Food: Quick, Simple, and Affordable for Everyday of the Week. It emphasizes eating healthy on a low budget.

• The book contains a week’s worth of recipes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, shopping lists, financial budgets, healthy snacks, and suggestions for eating and living healthy.

• Our research group advocates further research to be conducted on the population subset to assess the use and efficacy of our recipe book.

Barriers to Cooking More

Table: Percentage of Respondents

- Emotional/Energy Barriers
  - I am an emotional eater.
  - "Vegetables spoil so quickly; I end up throwing so much away."
  - I don’t like my gas stove.
  - I have a swallowing problem
  - I have a fear of stoves, oven, and getting burned.
  - I don’t feel like it.

- Fear Barriers
  - I have trouble eating portion-sized meals.
  - I have a fear of stoves, oven, and getting burned.

- Logistical/Financial Barriers
  - I don’t know what to buy.
  - I have a fear of stoves, oven, and getting burned.
  - I live alone.

- Menu Planning/Shopping Barriers
  - I don’t know what to buy.
  - "I have a fear of stoves, oven, and getting burned."
  - I have a fear of stoves, oven, and getting burned.

REFERENCES

