

## **Sustaining Healthy Living Programs in Our Community: Producing a Policies & Procedures Manual for the YMCA of WNC**

Cody Bushong  
University of North Carolina at Asheville  
Health and Wellness Promotion

Faculty Advisor: Ameena Batada  
Community Advisor: Nicole Coston, YMCA of WNC

### **Abstract**

The YMCA of WNC's nutrition department plans and distributes afterschool snacks for all partner schools to provide healthy fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to students. A more recent endeavor is the creation and management of a Healthy Living Pantry (HLP), Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen (HLMK), and Healthy Living Mobile Market (HLMM). Through these programs, the YMCA of WNC is able to distribute healthy food and provide nutrition education to underserved individuals and families. Despite notable growth and outreach in the year 2014, there was a need and opportunity to improve the functioning of the nutrition department as a whole. Management within the department realized they were in need of policies and procedures to document all rules, regulations, and instructions on how each program in the department is run. This public service project served to create such content for the HLP, HLMK, and HLMM. Working in these programs the prior six months provided me with valuable insight into how organizations like the YMCA work. The experience demonstrated the importance of policies and procedures to guide volunteers and employees in their work and the ability of an organization to adapt to constant change. Therefore, I pulled from my experiences and the organization's best practices to create a document that provides volunteers and employees guidance, but that is also adaptable to allow for any changes the organization might face in the future. The final policies and procedures manual will serve as a one-stop guide, which the nutrition department can utilize to effectively run programs and recruit, train, and manage employees and volunteers. Going forward, the policies and procedures manual will continue to help the department maximize the outcomes of its work.

**Key Words: Food Security, Healthy Living Pantry (HLP), Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen (HLMK), Healthy Living Mobile Market (HLMM), YMCA, Policies and Procedures Manual**

## Origins of the Project

Food security is a pressing concern in the United States. A large number of individuals and families in our country are not food secure. The Food Trust states, “Accessing healthy food is a challenge for many families, particularly those living in low income neighborhoods, communities of color, and rural areas” (Bell 9). The World Health Organization (WHO) describes food security as being based on the following three pillars: 1) food availability: sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis; 2) food access: having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; and 3) food use: appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation (Food Security). Without the kind of food security the WHO describes, hunger becomes a serious concern and people’s health and wellbeing are put at risk. Therefore, it is crucial to address the issue of food insecurity by providing resources that make healthy food available to those in need.

One resource available to those experiencing food insecurity is temporary food assistance. Seeing how urgent an issue food insecurity is here in Western North Carolina, the local YMCA identified an opportunity to provide temporary food assistance to individuals and families in the Asheville and surrounding communities. To provide this service the YMCA launched the Healthy Living Pantry (HLP) and Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen (HLMK). The YMCA uses these programs to alleviate food insecurity locally by working with community partners and distributing healthy food to individuals and families experiencing barriers in accessing it.

The HLP opened its doors in October 2013, just in time for Thanksgiving. The YMCA’s vision for the HLP was for it to be a unique food pantry in that it would focus on distributing food that was of high nutrient density. The pantry opened despite a particular characteristic of the surrounding community – an abundance of grocery stores selling a bounty of healthy food. One may wonder how useful a food pantry might be to a community with such a dense population of stores selling food.

In response to this question, a study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* found “few differences in perceptions of factors influencing food buying practices according to food desert status . . . participants from both the food deserts and oases used emergency food assistance programs regularly” (Walker 11). The authors point out that it’s not so much a matter of having grocery stores available to a community; rather, the affordability of the food sold in those grocery stores reflects a community’s ability to access that food. If individuals and families don’t earn enough income to afford shopping at a grocery store they must turn to another resource. In Asheville and the surrounding community, that’s where the HLP and later the HLMK are utilized to make an impact.

The HLMK was launched in April 2014. It serves as a traveling teaching kitchen and food distributor where YMCA employees and volunteers travel into under-served communities, teaching cooking skills, distributing food sourced from the HLP and distributing free meals to children under age 18. The YMCA saw this method of food distribution as a way to bring healthy food directly to areas experiencing the most access barriers.

My work with the YMCA of WNC started in spring semester 2014 as part of a class service learning project. It was that semester I began my time with the nutrition department’s HLP and HLMK bringing healthy food to under-served communities. Over the course of these first three months at the YMCA’s nutrition department, I developed a passion for community access to

healthy food. Through my work at the YMCA, I began to learn that the challenge of accessing healthy food is especially real for our communities here in Western North Carolina.

As my class service learning project was coming to an end, my supervisors at the YMCA and I realized an opportunity for my continued work with the nutrition department's HLP and HLMK. At the time the nutrition department was handling all logistics, client records, inventory, and all other data collection using paper documents and excel spreadsheets that had to be manually updated. The nutrition department manager approached me with the idea to implement an automatically updating computer system to take over these logistics. With the computer system, the nutrition department could keep automatic, real time records of client participation, incoming inventory, outgoing inventory, and all other relevant data. With such thorough and up-to-date records, the objective was to more effectively acquire grants in support of the YMCA nutrition department's work providing healthy food access to Western North Carolina.

As I will cover in a later section of this paper, the originally planned Community Engaged Scholar (CES) project to implement such a computer system was not able to be carried out. As the summer of 2014 ended and fall semester began, I met with my community advisor in August to discuss any projects or services the YMCA nutrition department needed undertaken. She asked if I might help produce a policies and procedures manual for the department, including all policies and procedures for the HLP, HLMK, and soon to be launched Healthy Living Mobile Market (HLMM). The YMCA considered the absence of a one-stop, all-inclusive guide to the nutrition department rules and functions a hindrance to department efficiency and effectiveness. This was especially true given how new the HLP, HLMK, and HLMM were, being less than a year old at the time.

I knew a document of guidelines for how to run the department and its components would serve the YMCA well, but I wasn't quite aware of the importance of such a document. I did research on policy and procedure manuals and came across information that led me to realize how essential such a document is for an organization. For example, the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council, out of Australia, provides a very helpful guide on how to produce a policies and procedures manual and describes why it's important to have one. Describing the importance of a policies and procedures manual, the council lists the following:

So people working in an organization can have a framework for actions that help them get on with the job they need to do. So people in the organization don't have to keep on discussing the same issues every time they arise – one well thought out decision can be applied to many similar cases for efficiency. Reduces the organizational risk through mandating compliance. So legal and other requirements can be met and as a quality improvement tool . . . Unwritten policies and procedures often lead to confusion and conflict. (2-3).

Once I became aware of the importance of a policies and procedures manual for an organization, I realized what a valuable opportunity producing such a product would be for the YMCA's nutrition department. I also saw it as a way to utilize my experience I'd acquired working with the department over the prior 6 months. I realized also from discussion with my community advisor that producing the manual would entail a large amount of independent work; I wouldn't be relying on another department at the YMCA to help produce the product like I'd experienced with the originally planned computer system project. I'd be held responsible for keeping with the project timeline and completing the manual with limited, however definite, input from

individuals aside from my community advisor and myself. Taking this into consideration, I agreed to produce the manual for the nutrition department over the fall semester of 2014.

### **Methods and Work Undertaken**

The goal of this project was to produce a policies and procedures manual that encompassed all logistical aspects of running the nutrition department’s HLP, HLMK and HLMM. To complete the project in as thorough a manner as possible, I constantly communicated with my community advisor, nutrition department staff and other relevant YMCA staff. I was diligent in communicating with staff members with the most comprehensive knowledge of each section included in the manual. This communication involved email and several in-person meetings throughout the fall 2014 semester. I also used documents and data created and compiled from the prior 7 months of my time at the YMCA and pulled from my personal experience for the HLP section of the manual.

I began my CES project in May 2014 with an original project of implementing a computer system into the HLP; however, due to circumstances discussed in the final project section later on, this original project had to be modified into a new one. This new project became my final project of producing a policies and procedures manual for the YMCA of WNC’s nutrition department. The time I spent working with the nutrition department over the summer of 2014 didn’t include any production of the policies and procedures manual; however, the work undertaken during that time served as incredibly valuable and relevant experience when finally producing the document in the fall. A timeline of my CES work with the YMCA, from the original project to the completion of the final project, is below.

<b>2014</b>	<b>CES Project Timeline</b>
<b>MAY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval of project to implement a computer data collection system in the HLP.</li> <li>• Begin weekly shopping trips to MANNA Food Bank to be continued through August.</li> <li>• Shop for box truck, composter, and freezer storage for HLP.</li> </ul>
<b>JUNE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with IT staff to plan work on the HLP computer system.</li> <li>• Meet with IT staff on how to integrate Daxko into HLP functions.</li> <li>• Begin transferring all client data to a single spreadsheet.</li> </ul>
<b>JULY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue work on the HLP computer system.</li> <li>• Remodel interior of the HLP.</li> <li>• Participate in weekly cooking and nutrition classes on the HLMK.</li> <li>• Original IT staff member no longer working on the HLP computer system.</li> <li>• Identify a new IT staff member to work on the computer system.</li> </ul>
<b>AUGUST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and implement a Rules and Regulations document for HLP clients.</li> <li>• New IT staff member working on the HLP computer system is no longer working at the YMCA.</li> <li>• Original CES project to implement an HLP computer system no longer moving forward.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval for a modified CES project – producing a policies and procedures manual for the YMCA of WNC’s nutrition department.</li> </ul>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin work on policies and procedures manual.</li> <li>• Produce sections for the HLMK and HLMM.</li> </ul>
<b>OCTOBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce sections for Dress Code, Code of Conduct, HLP functions and MANNA Food Bank shopping.</li> </ul>
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with Youth Services Volunteer Coordinator to discuss guidelines for nutrition department volunteer recruitment and management.</li> <li>• Produce section for volunteer policies and procedures.</li> </ul>
<b>DECEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with Healthy Living Coordinator to discuss incorporating data collection guidelines into the policies and procedures manual.</li> <li>• Complete YMCA of WNC Nutrition Department Policies and Procedures Manual.</li> </ul>

### **Original Project**

My original project was to incorporate a data collection computer system into HLP functions. This was slow to start, though, because IT personnel at the YMCA were busy transitioning the company to a new computer software program. Because of the slow start with IT, the YMCA allowed me to keep busy and gain experience working in other components of the nutrition department.

Beginning in May 2014 I continued shopping for the HLP at MANNA Food Bank each Tuesday, an activity I’d been participating in since February 2014. Over the course of the summer I was given more independence on these trips, going with co-volunteers and employees other than my community advisor. I was offered the responsibility to teach those new to the nutrition department how to shop at MANNA and how to purchase online orders on MANNA’s website. Shopping at MANNA is an experience identical to Dianne Jacob’s telling of food bank shopping in her article entitled *The Fine Art of Feeding the Hungry*. In the article she states, “products might be close to expiring, part of an overrun, less than perfect produce, new items that didn’t make it, or regular products that didn’t sell . . . Agency members come to the food bank to shop. Sometimes the food is free, but often they pay “shared maintenance,” or twelve to eighteen cents per pound, to partially cover food bank expenses” (Jacob 15). I recall days when MANNA had no fresh produce in edible condition. As Jacob’s describes in her article, food banks largely rely on donations of food that wouldn’t sell and the inconsistent nature of this reliance sometimes leads to a limited supply. Food pantries must then make do with what is available.

I also continued helping coordinate and facilitate HLP food distributions every Wednesday. This included stocking shelves, freezers, and refrigerators, assembling pre-packed bags, helping any pantry client in need of assistance and cleaning up after distribution. Aside from the weekly MANNA shopping trips and pantry distributions, I helped shop for items that would improve the functionality of the nutrition department. These items included a box truck, freezer storage and a composter. The box truck was needed for extra transport space for food picked up at MANNA and to enable the creation of the Healthy Living Mobile Market (HLMM). The freezer storage

would enable the nutrition department to more safely transport meat, dairy and other frozen or refrigerated items.

The composter was needed for efficient disposal of fresh produce that had gone bad and was no longer in distributable condition. Something we came up against regularly was the difficulty in running a pantry that handles so much fresh produce. Being a pantry whose mission is to distribute healthy food to those in need, this was a frequent issue. This is something that the YMCA nutrition department takes very seriously. Leah Kicinski's research project *Characteristics of Long and Short-Term Food Pantry Users* conveys why the YMCA takes this issue seriously. In the research paper Kicinski states, "dislikes ranged from needing to offer a specific item to issues of receiving expired food. Some pantry users then expressed that they were not so desperate that they would feed their family something harmful" (69). This feedback is identical to responses HLP staff received when we distributed a survey to HLP clients and we were able to use this feedback to adjust our practices and inventory to their needs.

Throughout June and July I met with IT personnel to discuss how we were going to implement the computer system into pantry functions. I transferred all client data not already electronically recorded from paper to an Excel spreadsheet for IT to transfer into the computer system. This spreadsheet served to make it easier for the IT department to import client data into a possible check-in system for the pantry.

At this same time I assisted other volunteers in remodeling the HLP. We cleaned out the pantry, built walls, and laid a tile floor. These remodeling activities were undertaken to improve the efficiency and functionality of the pantry and to create a better experience for clients. An additional outcome of the remodeling projects was increased space for additional refrigeration storage. This added storage helped prolong the shelf life of the pantry's fresh produce.

During the months of June and July in 2014, I was able to participate more with the HLMK than I had up until that time. The nutrition department was holding cooking demonstrations and nutrition lessons before pantry distribution each Wednesday. A study called *Learning from Program Participants: Obtaining Participant Input on Service Development in an Emergency Food Program* backs up the importance of including such components at a food pantry. It states:

The addition of cooking demonstrations/recipes/food storage fact sheets were generally supported by focus-group participants. They especially expressed support for having available recipes that involve foods with which they were unfamiliar . . . Cooking demonstrations with free samples featuring a food from that day's Producersmobile were seen as a good way to promote unfamiliar foods and healthier methods for preparation of familiar foods. (Mason 12)

I helped with the setup of these demonstrations and participated and observed between setup duties for the pantry distributions. The week the cooking instructor wasn't available for a demonstration, I was given the opportunity to teach the pantry clients how to make a recipe and discuss nutritional benefits of the ingredients. This gave me wonderful insight into other facets of what the YMCA nutrition department is doing to improve health in its community.

As the original project of implementing the pantry computer system still hadn't progressed I created a rules and regulations document, separate from the policies and procedures manual I'd later produce, for the HLP with clients being the target audience. Several instances of logistical mishaps and client-to-client conflicts during weekly distributions alerted the nutrition department that pantry guidelines were needed. For example, clients were sometimes taking more items than

allotted to them and conflicts between clients arose as a result of this. There were also times when popular items were of limited supply, leading to disagreements between clients. The rules and regulations document was to serve as a guide for clients on how to maneuver and participate in HLP distributions.

### **Project Modification**

Toward the end of August 2014 I was informed that the IT staff member working on the pantry computer system project was no longer an employee of the YMCA. As a result, the nutrition department had to postpone any plans of implementing a computer system into the HLP. It was at this time the nutrition department concluded it was not possible for my originally planned CES project to move forward.

Faced with the news, my community advisor and I met to discuss other options to make use of the time spent and knowledge gained during the prior 7 months working with the YMCA. Based on the work I'd done already, my experience with the nutrition department's activities and objectives and my demonstrated ability to create guideline documents, my community advisor offered me the opportunity to produce a policies and procedures manual for the YMCA of WNC's nutrition department. I accepted, seeing this as an opportunity to make use of the experience gained at the YMCA thus far and to learn new skills.

### **Final Project**

The first stage of producing the policies and procedures manual was discussing with the nutrition department what should be included in the document. This involved pulling from HLP and HLMK experiences both past and current, any procedures already regularly undertaken, and taking into consideration what might be needed to guide the department forward and prepare for the future. Using the information gathered from these discussions, I drafted a table of contents from which my community advisor and I created a schedule for the semester-long production of the manual.

The first section I added to the manual was the nutrition department contact information; a one-stop list of all nutrition department employees that can be contacted with issues or questions concerning the HLP, HLMK and HLMM. The second section included the HLP procedures. In this section I pulled heavily from my experiences working in the HLP to help formulate the guidelines. I included in the guidelines setup procedures for before the weekly food distributions, what to do during the distributions themselves and cleanup procedures following the distributions. And although I wasn't working directly with the HLP at this time, I relied on several visits to the pantry in order to get the most current and relevant information for what to include in the HLP section of the manual.

During the month of September 2014 I began producing the HLMK and HLMM sections of the manual. Because I had limited experience with the HLMK and no experience with the HLMM, I relied on communication with individuals knowledgeable of those components of the nutrition department for what to include in the manual. I was given a thorough list of policies and procedures by a YMCA employee to be reformatted and entered into the manual. Further communication was needed to verify current practices for certain components of the policies and procedures sent to me, but after several emails between myself and my community advisor I was able to finalize the HLMK and HLMM sections of the manual.

The month of October was a busy month at school and because of this I relied heavily on communicating by email any questions I needed answered concerning the manual. I continued to attend the weekly nutrition meetings held on site each Thursday. The sections for the code of conduct and dress code were added to the manual and were communicated to me by email from my community advisor. At this time I also produced the MANNA Food Bank shopping segment for both on-site shopping and online shopping. I was able to pull from first-hand knowledge gained from my experience doing this shopping throughout the previous spring and summer. In this section I was sure to include detailed, step by step instructions on how to shop both in the physical food bank and on the website. From experience I realized many who first start doing the shopping duties have trouble maneuvering the system and figuring out how they should go about the shopping. I wrote the instructions keeping in mind that I wanted any volunteer or staff member to read them and know exactly what to do.

In November it came time to add sections for volunteer recruitment, rules and regulations to the manual. Since I nor my community advisor were heavily involved in this area, I was put in touch with the volunteer coordinator of the nutrition department. I later met with the coordinator to discuss what to include in the policies and procedures manual concerning volunteers. We discussed any possible future changes in volunteer procedures, as he was at the time due to leave the YMCA sometime in the summer of 2015.

From the discussion I realized there might be changes in the future concerning this section, but that wasn't relevant enough to affect how I entered the volunteer information into the manual. What was interesting about this section of the manual is that I ended up placing the already created YMCA volunteer manual into this manual I was creating for the YMCA nutrition department. It was very helpful because it required much less time than if I'd written the volunteer procedures from scratch. I thought it very efficient that the YMCA had volunteer criteria and practices that are universal to every department company wide.

In December 2014 I began the final section of the policies and procedures manual. This final section serves to be a guide for all data collection in the nutrition department. The data collection includes tracking inventory, keeping records of clients and ensuring food distribution numbers are properly recorded so as to use these figures in grant writing. I had done much of the data collection for the nutrition department during my spring 2014 service learning project and during my original summer 2014 CES project. However, it had been several months since I'd been involved with that process and I had to be sure I had accurate and current information before creating the data collection guidelines.

I met with the nutrition department staff member in charge of data collection at the time. We discussed what was similar and what had changed since I'd last worked with the data collection. One thing that had changed was that the nutrition department had partnered with the local Trader Joe's grocery store and was receiving food from them. As part of the deal, the nutrition department had to keep accurate records in a particular format for Trader Joe's to review. Because of this I had to learn how the Trader Joe's data was being tracked and incorporate that into the manual. Aside from this, the data collection system remained largely the same from when I created them earlier in the year and so I was able to pull from experience when creating the rest of the data collection section of the manual.

This was the last section of the policies and procedures manual that needed entered. From there all that was left to do was formatting. I spent time carefully making sure the document was

uniform, professional and easy to follow. Any section of the manual that involved pulling from a YMCA of WNC document already in print was listed as a supplementary resource at the end of the manual. The YMCA of WNC's Code of Conduct, Dress Standards Policy, and Youth Services Volunteer Handbook were the documents listed under supplementary resources. After editing and formatting was complete I sent the final document to my community advisor, who was the nutrition department director at the time, for final approval. Once she approved the manual it had one last step, brand approval, before I could be officially used by the nutrition department.

### **Ties to Academia**

As a Health and Wellness Promotion major, my time with the YMCA's nutrition department has been a reaffirming one. This reaffirmation has taken form in both positive and disheartening ways throughout the duration of my work with the HLP, HLMK, and HLMM. In much of our classroom lectures and readings in the Health and Wellness department, we students learn about the less than ideal position many are in concerning health, socio-economic status, access to resources and many other grim realities of underserved individuals, families, and communities.

The connection I was able to make during my project at the YMCA was that between information taught in an academic setting and the real life examples seen every Wednesday during the HLP's food distribution. This is where affirmation of content taught in the academic setting took form in a disheartening way. I saw and heard firsthand individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, thankful for the HLP for providing healthy food to sustain them another week. I was able to speak with these people and discuss their experiences and lives. It was disheartening to see so many in need of food and with seemingly little hope for a near-sighted solution. Paynter, Berner and Anderson point out this long-term need for food assistance in their research project entitled *When even the 'dollar value meal' costs too much: food insecurity and long term dependence on food pantry assistance*. When discussing the research they state:

Unfortunately, the situation of the clients seems disappointingly stable. That is, clients seem to rely on food pantries for long term assistance without the promise of solutions for bettering their situations. Without systemic policy change, including but not limited to considerations of raising the minimum wage, healthcare reform, and educational opportunities, the working poor, and others experiencing the struggles related to food insecurity will continue to remain on the rolls of clients requesting assistance from the network of nonprofit food pantries across North Carolina (Paynter 49)

The learning is not all disheartening. It's wonderful knowing that what the nutrition department is doing running the HLP, HLMK and HLMM is going to provide these people with healthy food as long as they need it. Over the many months working with the nutrition department I had countless discussions with staff members, volunteers and clients. Much of these discussions concerned issues surrounding poverty, inequity, hunger, the food system, unemployment, disenfranchised and underserved individuals, families and communities and so on. It was during these conversations I'd tie ideas and concepts back to class discussions, lectures and readings. I found it so much easier to navigate these real-world discussions with the knowledge obtained from the Health and Wellness Promotion classes I'd taken.

Another positive affirmation of course content was seeing real-world effort being put into an issue such as food access. We learn about public health models in class that can be used to work

toward eliminating barriers to food access and my experience with the YMCA nutrition department has enabled me to see first-hand what that entails out in the field. The nutrition department staff tirelessly work to use methods of public health communication and community interaction to promote health and provide access to healthy food. They take seriously the fact that they must know their community and their needs before deciding on long term practices. They get to know their clients and plan and conduct the HLP, HLMK, and HLMM services accordingly.

For example, the YMCA made sure to print new client forms in Spanish language for any possible Hispanic clients. We were sure to keep these forms on hand at the pantry and they were also used extensively during community events off-site. According to the study entitled *Household Food Security among Migrant and Seasonal Latino Farmworkers in North Carolina*, “Data published by the USDA show that 11.1% of all households in the United States experienced food insecurity in 2002; 21.7% of the Hispanic population was food insecure, almost twice the national percentage” (Quandt 569). By seeing this statistic and using it to know our audience, we can see the importance of offering Spanish language materials to best serve Spanish speaking clients of the HLP, HLMK and HLMM. The YMCA foresaw this need and planned accordingly.

Another aspect I tied back from academic experience was the fact that the realities out in the field might not be exactly as you predict them to be. This was the case when, over time working at the pantry, I realized how many single adults relied on the weekly food distributions. I never thought the proportion of single adults to families would be so high among the pantry clients. I’d imagined families with children would be more in need of food assistance. I learned that wasn’t the case and Kabbani and Kmeid discuss why this might be in a study where they state the following:

The number of children less than five years old and between the ages of five and eighteen are also positively associated with lower odds of food insecurity. One possible explanation for this finding is that households with children are more likely to be eligible for food assistance. Households with children are able to receive food stamp benefits indefinitely, as long as they meet program eligibility requirements, and the NSLP is only available to school-age children. (443)

The ties between academia and producing the policies and procedures manual have shown themselves in similar ways. To produce the most relevant and useful document possible, I had to understand my audience. I took into careful consideration the needs of nutrition department staff and clients when piecing together the guidelines for the manual. This concept of knowing your audience and planning services accordingly is one we in the Health and Wellness department discuss often. Because of my academic background I realized the importance of knowing my audience and strived to produce a product that would serve the needs of that audience. The very nature of approaching this CES project can be tied to those academic lessons. Applying for and moving forward with this project has helped my understanding of what it means to recognize a need in the community but at the same time not force my ideas.

### **Challenges Faced and Responses to those Challenges**

I experienced many challenges over the course of this project and many were in the form of setbacks and changes in plans. My original CES project was to help implement a computer system into the HLP’s functions that would enable staff to automatically record client visits,

incoming inventory and outgoing inventory. This project began in May 2014 but IT staff didn't have time to meet with me until the following month. I finally met with an IT staff member in June and quickly learned that implementing the computer system was not going to be as easy as I'd thought. The YMCA of WNC was currently transitioning their company-wide software system from one called "ccc" to a new and improved system called "Daxko." I was told this project was rather momentous for IT staff and was going to occupy much of their time over the summer.

The IT staff member gave me a task that would help her at least get started on the computer system. She asked that I compile all nutrition department client data into a single spreadsheet so she could more efficiently input that data into a computer system. I began work on the spreadsheet and continued doing other work for the nutrition department. As time went on over the course of the next month, IT continued to be too busy for me to meet with them. Then, in July, I was informed that the IT staff member who had been working on the computer system would not be able to move forward with the project.

At the time I didn't fully understand what kind of commitment this software transition was for the IT department. I was discouraged in that I interpreted IT staff's lack of attention to the HLP computer system as them not believing in its potential benefits to the program. I'm now a part-time staff member at the Asheville YMCA as of October 2014 and work alongside some of the IT staff I encountered during my work to implement the computer system. I now see first-hand how busy the YMCA keeps the IT department and, after working with the software system Daxko for several months, I can fully understand why IT personnel had no time to commit to my project. The work-load in addition to the complexity of the Daxko software system no doubt kept the IT staff incredibly busy during the transition.

After receiving the news, though, the nutrition department began work on identifying another IT staff member who'd be willing and have the time to work on the project. It didn't take long to identify one and in July my community advisor and I met with the staff member to discuss our plans. I sent him the client data spreadsheet and he began work on his end. The project continued to be slow moving through the rest of the following month. It was then, in August, that I was informed this staff member newly working on the project was no longer an employee of the YMCA. My community advisor told me the computer system project was not going to work out. As of August 2014 the nutrition department and I were no longer moving forward with my original CES project.

Shortly after receiving the news my community advisor and I met to discuss the situation. From my experience thus far with the nutrition department and shown ability in producing documents, my community advisor asked if I might produce a policies and procedures manual for the YMCA of WNC's nutrition department. She explained that since the HLP, HLMK and HLMM projects were so new, they didn't have documented guidelines on how to coordinate and facilitate their functioning. It was a document that needed to be created but no staff member in the nutrition department had the time to work on it. Seeing the opportunity to put my experience with the department to use, I agreed to work on the manual as part of a revised CES project.

There were several challenges I faced over the next several months working on the policies and procedures manual. The most reoccurring and consistent challenge was time and availability. This document meant a lot to the nutrition department and it was important to create a document that included all the necessary pieces and in the right way. To do this most effectively it was

crucial that I meet with my community advisor in person each week to review and discuss the manual. Working on the manual during the school semester proved to make meeting each week very difficult. The nutrition department had a weekly meeting on Thursday; however, due to my class schedule I was only able to make the latter half of it and that's if I could make it at all.

If meeting on Thursday didn't work out my community advisor and I would schedule one-on-one meetings. These meetings were difficult to schedule as well because of how busy both our schedules were. There were weeks when we weren't able to meet at all and had to rely on communicating about the manual via email. These communication experiences were difficult to navigate well, but most of the time they were sufficient in getting our concerns across and our questions answered.

Another challenge I faced with producing the policies and procedures manual was working on the sections I had no first-hand experience with or knowledge of. I was very comfortable writing about the HLP, but I had limited experience with the HLMK and HLMM. I also had little knowledge of volunteer policies and managed this by meeting with the youth services volunteer coordinator to discuss how to include them in the nutrition department manual. From this meeting I was easily able to include the information needed concerning volunteers in the nutrition department manual.

## **Results**

The completed YMCA of WNC Nutrition Department Policies and Procedures Manual is the result of this project. In hindsight, the events that led up to the production and completion of the document seem to have worked well building off on each other. The experiences and challenges I faced during my original CES project instilled in me much of the knowledge I needed to work on this project.

I've also evolved as a health promoter as a result of this project. Facing the challenges, setbacks and constant changes during my time working in the community with the YMCA has strengthened my ability to work with change instead of being opposed to it. I now see the opportunities in the changes that take place when working in the community. I'm fond of how Randi Love describes community service learning when she states, "Some measure of control is sacrificed when the community becomes the classroom. Partnering with the community should be viewed as a process as opposed to a discrete event. Faculty would benefit from recognizing that all parties bring liabilities and assets, and from acknowledging the complexity of social organizations" (247).

In addition to feeling more confident working with change and the unpredictable nature of community projects, I have also improved my ability to work as a team in creating a product and coordinating and facilitating a project. My experience with the YMCA has instilled in me the ability and confidence to say I'm prepared to work in any environment where teamwork is essential to getting work done. I'm also much more comfortable with my professional written and verbal communication skills and feel they've improved immensely thanks to the extensive communication via both methods this project required.

As a result of this project the YMCA of WNC now has a one-stop, comprehensive resource to serve as a guide in the running of the HLP, HLMK and HLMM. By serving this role, the policies and procedures manual will be a key document in encouraging best practices and the efficient management of programs that are in place to alleviate food insecurity in Western North Carolina.

By laying the grounds for continued growth and increased outreach, the manual will be a foundational document that promotes equity, food security and access to resources in Asheville and surrounding communities. By way of promoting such important components of individual, family and community health and wellbeing, the policies and procedures manual supports and contributes to civil society.

### **Sustainability**

When discussing with my community advisor the opportunity to create a policies and procedures manual for the YMCA's nutrition department, she stressed the importance of the creation of such a document for the sustainability of the HLP, HLMK and HLMM. Before this manual was created there were no written guidelines for the running of these programs. We discussed how if the few staff members working on these programs were to no longer work for them there would be nothing to reference for future staff. This would jeopardize the continued existence of these programs and would at the very least pass on a steep learning curve for future staff.

There was also a need for current staff members to have a written, one-stop resource to reference concerning the running of the HLP, HLMK and HLMM. The nutrition department continued to become increasingly busy due to the growth of these programs and this continued growth called for a document of guidelines to serve as a foundation to sustain it. These guidelines will hold all nutrition department staff accountable and will enable them to focus on continuing the growth experienced by the department's programs without having to keep track of any unwritten policies and procedures.

The policies and procedures manual will be of great use to the nutrition department when hiring new staff and recruiting new volunteers. With all rules, regulations and guidelines on how the HLP, HLMK, and HLMM function already written in a single document there will be a lot of time freed up for current staff when training new staff and volunteers. The policies and procedures manual can also be used for new staff and volunteers when they have questions about any of the programs and how they're run if they don't have access to an experienced staff member at the time. In addition, the manual can also assist with and facilitate independent learning for new staff and volunteers upon joining the nutrition department.

### **Conclusion**

This project was a long and challenging experience that had wonderful outcomes. The completion of the YMCA of WNC Nutrition Department Policies and Procedures Manual was the intended outcome after transitioning from my original project to this one. This document will serve as a one-stop guide, which the nutrition department can utilize to effectively run programs and recruit, train, and manage employees and volunteers. Going forward, the policies and procedures manual will continue to help the department maximize the outcomes of its work and sustain its programs.

In addition to completing the manual, I've improved my professional written and verbal communication skills as a result of the immense amount of communication involved in completing this project. I also have gained first-hand experience of academic lessons learned in the Health and Wellness Promotion department and understand more fully the concepts taught in class lectures, discussions and readings. Perhaps the biggest lesson I've learned from this project is the nature of working in the community and in public health. It's a field of constant change with an organic flow that is at much of the time unpredictable. Learning to navigate that

environment has increased my confidence in my future career goals immensely. I'm surer now than ever that improving the health of communities is possible no matter the sequence of events or whether things go as planned. I'll take the lessons learned from completing this project with me as I complete my education and venture into a career in health promotion.

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