COMMUNITY KITCHEN ASSESSMENT PROPOSAL

Introduction

Community kitchens are community-based cooking programs where groups of individuals gather to prepare meals together on a regular basis (Tarasuk, 2001). This project aims to collect data on community kitchens, to demonstrate specifically how community kitchens serve as an innovative approach to meet the food security needs of these individuals. Knowledge gained could bring attention to the holistic needs of communities by connecting social aspects of food issues so that local communities can have access to safe, culturally appropriate, and wholesome food.
Project Objectives

By conducting an assessment of the community kitchen facilities in the Point Grey and Kitsilano neighbourhoods, we plan to identify areas for potential improvement. This enhances community kitchens’ role in providing valuable food assets to local residents while building a strong sense of community.

- Informing positive improvements by gaining information about the status quo of community kitchens (i.e., physical conditions, quality of programming), specifically in the areas West Point Grey/ Kitsilano
- Clarifying the role of each community kitchen as a source to emerge food security

Inquiry Questions

- What is the status quo of community kitchens in the West Point Grey/ Kitsilano neighbourhoods in terms of physical conditions and quality of programming; and how can these aspects be improved?
- What role does each community kitchen play as an emerging food security source in cities?

Background & Significance

1. Global food security, Community food security & Community Kitchens

The concept of food security has been around since the late 20th century, stemming from the need to address the capacity of the food system to feed the growing world population. It is defined by the FAO as a state, “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (World Food Summit, 1996). This definition implies a generalized approach that has observed much inefficiency and failures (Dilley & Boudreau, 2001). A more recently developed food security concept scales down the focus from world to community and as such appropriately redefines the strategy to solve more specific food issues at local level through an asset-based community development framework. Recognizing the effectiveness of this new approach, the City of Vancouver identifies Community Kitchens as a significant physical food asset that targets two major priority areas in the Vancouver Food Strategy: food access and citizens’ empowerment.
2. **Community Kitchen Assessment at Kitsilano, West Point Grey Areas**

Kitsilano and West Point Grey present interesting case studies with regard to community kitchens due to their distinctive demographic characteristics. For example, most people living in Kitsilano have post-secondary education (80.6%); this high percentage reflects on the average yearly income of the neighbourhood ($83,581), a sum well above the 2010 national average yearly income of $32,100 for unattached individuals (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Evident from the statistics, these two neighbourhoods are among Vancouver’s most affluent with reputations for their strong organic food culture and diversity of independently owned businesses, especially in the foodservice sector (Kitsilano, n.d.) (West Point Grey, n.d.). Despite this, recent evidence shows the presence of a vulnerable subpopulation (i.e., seniors, single mothers) in the area that might require special attention with regards to food access and community support. For instance, a temporary shelter in Kitsilano experienced full occupation within days of opening in 2010 (Howsan, 2010). Thus, we could investigate how community kitchens in these neighbourhoods may provide specific services targeted to these individuals.

**Methods**

To seek out the six community kitchens we assess, we will rely on purposive sampling, formally approaching kitchen coordinators through email to secure our interviews as well as snowball sampling methods to contact those kitchens harder to find. For the assessment of kitchen conditions, we will use observation as well as a survey to determine the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the kitchens’ infrastructure and programming. To evaluate our own interactions with the community kitchens, we will ask each community kitchen managers to provide us with verbal feedback on our engagement.

For open-ended questions, we will use qualitative content analysis to categorize verbatim responses. The results will be represented using MS Excel to assist us with further analysis on the trends and characterization of the kitchens’ conditions. In general, good facilities and infrastructures would improve food access, while programming would have more major impacts on empowering residents.

Special attention will be paid to ethics, for example, ensuring our questions to kitchen staff are culturally- sensitive and positively- framed to reflect the asset-based development framework. All community kitchen assessors will be in possession of the TCPS-2 Certificate for Ethical Research to ensure the research participants’ perspectives are properly documented or when necessary, kept confidential.
Our project methodology faces certain limitations. The threshold of six community kitchens limits our understanding of the complex food insecurity issues in these neighborhoods. Also, the use of a standard survey might be too generalized to capture the conditions of individual kitchens we assess.

**Success Factors**

Toward the end of our Community Kitchen Assessment, we will evaluate the success of our project based on the following criteria:

1. **Gathering complete data from a total of six community kitchens**
   - Filled surveys with information indicated through an annotated map or spreadsheet

2. **Receiving positive feedback from our community partners indicating that we have engaged professionally**
   - We will ask for this feedback after each of our site visits

3. **Following the asset-based framework in our report and recommendations**
   - Good relationship with the community kitchens at the end of the project
   - Minimize subjective opinions in the essays
   - Survey question: Anything else that you want to mention? How do you evaluate us as interviewers?
   - Good conversation with the community kitchens
   - In the essay: Incorporate suggestions that stem from the ideas of the community kitchens

By achieving this set of criteria, we will be able to provide the City of Vancouver’s Social Policy Department with enough information on the kitchen conditions for updates to its Food Strategy so that it can best build upon the food security assets in these neighbourhoods, and also know which specific areas in the kitchens (i.e., safety, programming, funding) to best tackle through the survey findings. In addition, by employing most of the asset-based development characteristics to foster better connections with the community kitchen facilitators, we can gain their trust so that they are more receptive to outside support and/or knowledge transfer.
(i.e., the City of Vancouver) in the future. Additionally, this project can highlight community kitchens’ potential for forging social connections in areas outside of the inner city.

Sources


