

Addressing Food Insecurity in New Brunswick, NJ

Student Interns:

Alexsandra Apostolico, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Public Health
Daniel McGruther, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Health Related Professions
John Azer, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Preceptors:

Community: Lisanne Finstone, M.Div., MSW, Elijah's Promise
Academic: Bernadette West, Ph.D., University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Public Health
Sheryl Geisler, MS, PA-C, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Health Related Professions
Sonia Garcia Laumbach, MD, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Elijah's Promise

18 Neilson Street
New Brunswick, NJ

Mission Statement:

Elijah's promise seeks to break the cycle of hunger in the New Brunswick community. Elijah's promise works to shift the hunger paradigm from "something is better than nothing" to engaging in efforts to provide all individuals in the New Brunswick area the opportunity to enjoy delicious, healthy meals.

Healthy People 2020 Bridging the Gaps Focus Areas (adapted from HP2012 and HP 2012)- Nutrition and Weight Status · Diabetes · Food Safety · Health-Related Quality of Life and Well Being · Social Determinants of Health

Three Key Focus Projects:

- 1) Program Evaluation for "Let's Cook!" Cooking Class series, a four-week cooking course that was designed to educate low-income families on how to eat healthy while still on a budget. Team members developed pre- and post-surveys that would be used to gauge the effectiveness of the program. Interns also developed a survey that was sent out to all past members of the cooking class, looking to gauge the long-term effects of such a class.
- 2) Team Members worked on the development of several videos as an aid to the 'Let's Cook' program. Topics were chosen based on their observation of the class and information from the surveys.
- 3) Team members worked on the formation of lunch menus that meet the new regulations set forth by the USDA for the catering business that runs out of Elijah's Promise

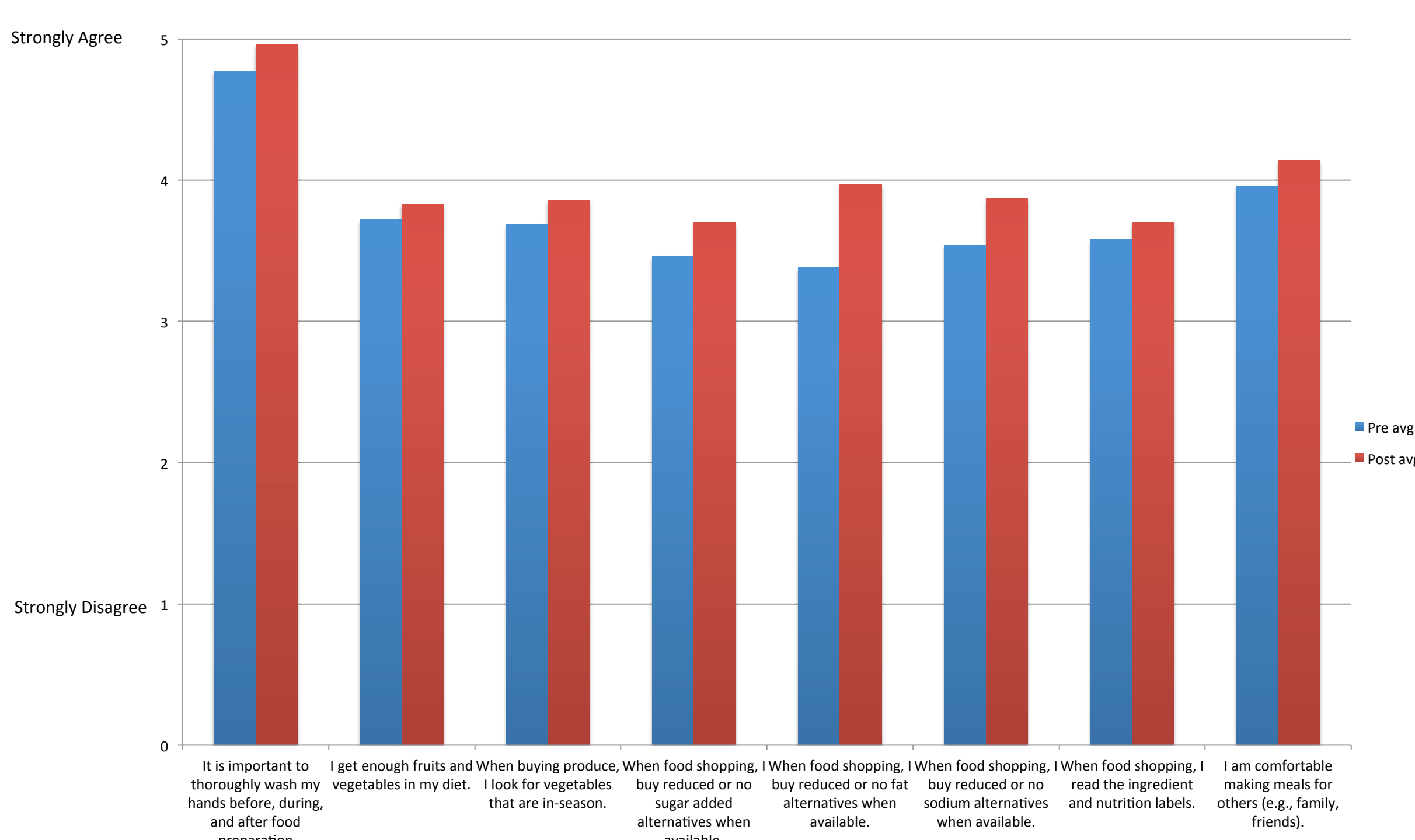


Food Justice and Affordable Nutrition

In light of the obesity epidemic and the widespread distribution of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and various other cardiovascular disease, Elijah's promise is seeking to shift the hunger paradigm from simply providing those in need with 'enough food' to providing people with sustainable local food systems that ensure community members access to affordable and healthy food. Elijah's promise is not simply in the business of charity, they are in the business of social enterprise, and providing individuals the opportunity to help themselves, and to provide for themselves. Elijah's promise works beyond handing out nutritious meals to those in need, they seek to educate individuals about how healthy food changes lives.

Survey Results:

Figure 1. Selected Changes in Food Behaviors Before and After "Let's Cook" Classes



Participants, on both pre- and post-surveys, reported positive responses on the majority of items. Pre- and post-survey administration ($n = 27$ at week one; $n = 23$ at week four) revealed positive differences on several items (see figure 1); however, many other items showed a very small margin of positive difference, no difference, or a negative difference between pre- and post-survey administration. Statistical tests for significance were not performed. While the survey proved revealing in a qualitative sense, methodological issues likely contributed to the lackluster statistical results. Survey administration procedures were inconsistent throughout the evaluation period, overall samples were small, and there was no way to ensure that the same participants each took pre- and post-surveys or that post-survey respondents had attended more than one class. Follow-up survey data is not yet available.

Overall Findings and Recommendations:

- 1) The evaluation of the "Let's Cook" program served a two-fold purpose: interns conducted a formative evaluation through survey administration, observation, and interviews as well as delivered program-specific evaluation instruments and recommendations to strengthen internal capacity for self-assessment. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected, interns offered suggestions for improvement, including:
 - Development of a uniform, core curriculum that can be followed by all instructors.
 - Email reminders at start of each week including weekly agendas
 - Emphasis on goal setting within and outside of class
 - Emphasis on commitment to all 4 cooking classes
 - Continued evaluation in the form of pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys

- 2) Interns pitched and produced three, five-minute instructional videos, featuring the chefs of "Let's Cook" discussing skills and tips related to class content:
 - How to cut up a whole chicken
 - An Introduction to Farmer's Markets
 - How to stock a healthy pantry

Additionally, interns provided the program with a list of topics that could also be the subjects of supplemental videos. Videos will be posted online as well as given out to students following completion of the class series.

- 3) Interns delivered a 14-day menu in line with new regulations to catering staff for review; after initial review and discussion, chefs and interns selected several recipes to test out in the kitchen and provide feedback on the actual production of the new menu items. Future steps include taste testing with charter school students and adapting recipes to incorporate seasonal items.

Bridging the Gaps Reflections:

Through this internship, we have collectively been able to take an interdisciplinary approach to assessing and deciphering the issues of food insecurity in the New Brunswick area. As advocates for the distribution of health, we understand that it is paramount that all spectrums of health care providers are able to collaborate meaningfully and learn from each other as this internship has allowed us to do. Working in New Brunswick, we were able to witness firsthand the health disparities that exist with a focus in hunger – a basic human need. An understanding of all health disparities and their connection with each other is necessary when envisioning a comprehensive solution for widespread hunger, a goal we can better appreciate after our time working through Bridging the Gaps at Elijah's promise.

Acknowledgements: In addition to our community and academic preceptors, we are grateful to the staff of Elijah's Promise and Ms. Gwyneth Eliasson for their support.