

For Immediate Release

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High Plains Food Bank Partners with Heal the City in Pilot Program, *Food to Health*

Partnership aims to combat underlying issues caused by poor diet

Amarillo, Texas – In step with Feeding America’s Community Nutrition Initiative, *Hunger and Health*, High Plains Food Bank (HPFB), is moving toward increased community outreach efforts to promote health and healing through proper nutrition in individuals struggling with poverty and food insecurity.

In a June 2016 article, The New York Times shared, “In 2014, one-third of the 15.5 million households served by Feeding America, the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization, reported that a household member had diabetes. Inconsistent access to food worsens the disease, and so can the offerings at the pantries many low-income people must rely on.” The article goes on to report, “More than \$1 out of every \$10 spent on health care nationwide goes directly to treating diabetes and its consequences, according to the American Diabetes Association.”

Additionally, research shows that food security [i] is a social determinant of health and plays a critical role in a person’s ability to become and stay healthy. Individuals and families who lack consistent access to enough healthy food may have a higher risk of developing chronic diseases like obesity [ii], hypertension [iii] and type 2 diabetes [iv].

Recognizing the need to provide *foods that heal*, High Plains Food Bank initiated a partnership with Heal the City Amarillo, who provides free, quality, urgent medical care and referral services to the uninsured in our community. Heal the City noted that many of their patients are living with type 2 diabetes, and could benefit from nutrition-based interventions.

HPFB and Heal the City began meeting to develop a pilot program that would include nutrition education, healthy food, and medical care for food insecure patients who struggle with type 2 diabetes. Heal the City identified 20 participants to take part in (what became) a 12-week pilot program, appropriately named *Food to Health*, which was funded by Amarillo Area Foundation.

Food to Health participants gathered each Thursday evening at Amarillo United Citizens Forum, where they were guided by HPFB and Heal the City staff, along with 10 community volunteers. Participants were provided with 3 boxes of food for every 2 people in their family. Dieticians volunteered at each session, providing menus and recipes they had developed for the week, using food ingredients selected by Justin Young, The Garden at HPFB’s Director of Nutrition Education. Thursday sessions equipped participants with quality (diabetes-friendly) food, meal plans, cooking demonstrations, and lifestyle change lessons, all geared toward improving health & quality of life.

It became evident early on that the majority of participants were engaged and motivated to improve their health. While it could take a minimum of 3 months to measure diabetic and overall health

improvements, both High Plains Food Bank and Heal the City have noted progress in the participants' lives, and desire to see this healing work continue.

Director of Philanthropy, Maria DeBrango Stickel has spearheaded much of the project through High Plains Food Bank, and recently secured a second grant for its continuation. Maria noted, "The overall goal of the partnership between HPFB and Heal the City was to educate, connect, and provide resources for those whose health has been affected by food insecurity. This project demonstrates the positive steps that individuals can take when they have the necessary resources of good food and quality healthcare in a caring setting. Food insecurity, nutrition, and health are vitally interconnected, as our participants have proven."

Heal the City Amarillo Clinic Director, Chelsea Stevens expressed how pleased she was with the positive impacts of the program. She shared, "This program has enabled our patients to take ownership of their health, going beyond just having a diagnosis to understanding the disease process and creating a sense of community with other participants to support each other on their journey to improve their health."

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The High Plains Food Bank is a charitable food and nutritional education/promotion organization that distributes food to over 179 non-profit agencies throughout 29 counties of the Texas Panhandle. In 2016, the food bank distributed over 7.6 million pounds of food (of which over 2 million pounds was fresh produce).

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Heal the City Clinic is a medical mission providing free quality urgent medical care and referral services with compassion and dignity to the uninsured of our community. Our vision: To provide for the medical needs of the uninsured while connecting them to the existing health community. To share Christ's love and hope with patients and volunteers alike.

Sources

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