

Making the Switch to Client Choice

The Traditional Model

- Prepacked bags/boxes of food
- Little to no choice of products received
- Clients may receive products that they don't like, need or unable to prepare or to consume due to dietary restraints
- May result in waste of food

The Client Choice Model

- Much like shopping at the grocery store
- Maintains client dignity/treats with respect
- Very little to no waste of food as clients select foods they will consume/use
- A way to develop a deeper, more meaningful emotional relationship with clients
- A way to stock food preferred by clients

Myths/Truths About Client Choice

- Will run out of “best” foods more quickly
 - Can still place limits on number of items to select (i.e. limit of three cans of vegetables per person)
 - Can develop “pounds or point system” for foods and limit visits to number of pounds or points client is eligible for

Myths/Truths About Client Choice

- Need more space for client choice
 - In most cases, can do client choice in same size area, may need to separate shopping and storage area
 - May need to rearrange food space for smoother flow of traffic in client choice model
 - If still lack space for shopping, can do client choice from a menu of items for clients to select from

Myths/Truths About Client Choice

- Will take more time to all client shopping
 - Initially will probably take more time, since clients will not be used to shopping, but in long run time will probably even out
 - May be able to expand hours of operation to accommodate client choice with same number of volunteers, because of volunteer role change

Myths/Truths About Client Choice

- Will lose volunteers who do not believe in the client choice model
 - May end up losing some volunteers who are not willing to change
 - May pick up additional volunteers who like the more interactive approach with clients

Myths/Truths About Client Choice

- Will need more/less volunteers
 - Total number of volunteers needed will probably not change
 - May be able to spread volunteer time out to cover more operational time
 - Roles of volunteers will change to:
 - Assistance with shopping/product selection
 - Assistance with packing products into bags/boxes

Client Choice Options

- Clients shop for products with limits on items – i.e. three cans of vegetables, etc
- List of products and clients “circle” the products that they want with limits on products selected
- Pounds/Points system – limit selection to a number of pounds or points

Feedback from Peers

- Bloomer Area Food Pantry – “We saved money, everyone got what they wanted or did not take what they did not want. Everyone wins! For us, it is a matter of being respectful. I can only imagine how I would feel if I went into the grocery store and a clerk gave me a bag of groceries and told me to go home and fix my meal with what she/he gave me. And, by the way, be grateful for what you got!!!! The volunteers interact with the clients, something that they do not do when they just come, bag food and go home. They get to talk to families, get to know them, see that they are people just like the rest of us. It is a learning experience for many and something they come to enjoy. It does not take any more room. You put out what you have for the day or what you think you will need for the day, depending on the number of clients you are expecting, and you can store the rest out of site until the next day when you are open. You have volunteers bring out what you want clients to take, and save the rest for the next open day. After you have done it for a while, you can judge what/how much to put out for a day.”“

Feedback from Peers

- Stepping Stones – Menomonie – “Less food is wasted, because the client can take just what they need or what they know that their family likes and they can leave food if they do not eat that particular item. It takes much less time for each client to visit the pantry from check in to when they leave. We know the popular types of food and can order more of these items. It increases the interaction between volunteers/staff and the client. This makes for a much more positive experience for the client. They form relationships with us and they feel more comfortable coming to the pantry. When more people in need feel comfortable about utilizing our services, then we get a few steps closer to ending hunger within the community. Allowing the client the choice to select their own food items instills some dignity and they are at a time in their life when they really need this.”

Feedback from Peers

- Hayward Community Food Shelf – “We believe that allowing our clients to choose certain items enables them to select food that they and their families like to eat. And it avoids situations in which we provide food that may be discarded and wasted because it may be an item that they don't enjoy. With the number of clients we see each week increasing, and the cost of food also moving higher, we want to make sure we spend our dollars wisely and by providing choices to our clients we believe we are more effective and efficient. In fact last year we surveyed our clients and found that a very high percentage indicated they like the selection of food we provide.”

Additional Information

- YouTube Client Choice Videos
 - Food Bank Client Choice Video - General video on client choice - 7 minutes, 29 seconds
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGNDNT0bafw>
 - Making the Switch: A guide for converting to a client choice – General video on client choice – 8 minutes, 9 seconds -
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztD_UobB0yE
 - Purdueagriculture - Short general video on client choice - 34 seconds -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs4JvdUbMsY>