

**The Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program
A Rhode Island SNAP Program for Targeted Populations
Evaluation of the Pilot Phase
October 2011 – November 2012**

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For the RI Coalition for the Homeless**

Purpose of Evaluation

The evaluation of the Food Access Project was commissioned by the RI Coalition for the Homeless, with funding from the Rhode Island Foundation. The goals, as determined by the Food Access/Restaurant Meals Program Steering Committee, were:

- To provide a formalized evaluation of the project's model, including a history of the project.
- To understand what works and future challenges to help support a well-thought out expansion of the program.
- To identify levels of satisfaction with the program and its effectiveness among consumers, vendors, the Department of Human Services and others.
- To document the start-up processes, current status and feedback from stakeholders about the pilot project.
- To provide a case study describing the model and its efficacy.
- To assist in the determination of an outcome data collection process to assist in future evaluation of the program beyond the initial phase.

Accordingly, the evaluation strives to answer the following questions:

- What is the history of the program?
- Did the program meet its desired goal: to increase access to food for those without kitchens and cooking facilities?
- How well was the program implemented?
- What was the experience of the target populations?
- What was the experience of the restaurant owners and managers?
- Were there any unintended outcomes or consequences?
- How cost/effective/efficient is the program?
- What do the participant organizations think about the program thus far?
- What about the program works well and what needs improvement?
- Is the program valuable enough to expand and/or replicate?
- What is the most effective and efficient outcome measurement process to use going forth?

Evaluation Methodology

To address the above questions, the following methodology was used.

- A review of documents and background material relevant to the program's conception and implementation.
- A review of materials and documents from programs in California, Arizona, and Michigan.
- A review of relevant information from national poverty advocacy groups.
- A review of material from focus groups conducted before project implementation.
- A review of data collected by the Department of Human Services.
- Interviews, individual and group, with participants from the target populations: people who are homeless, elders, people with disabilities.
- Interviews with Subway restaurant owners.
- Interviews with representatives from the participating organizations and stakeholders.
- Development of a case study to illustrate how the program operates and how it achieves results.
- Analysis and recommendations.

History and Background of the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program

The Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program began with an idea first developed by Diane Martins, PhD, RN, an associate professor at the University of Rhode Island, College of Nursing. Dr. Martins had been volunteering as a nurse with the medical van and clinic at Crossroads RI, a multi-service center for people who are homeless. In her work at Crossroads, Dr. Martins came to realize that people who were homeless had difficulty securing food and particularly nutritious food. She became concerned that the homeless had increased health risks due to their inability to consistently obtain nutritious food.

In 2004, as part of the URI Partnership in Food, Hunger and Nutrition, Dr. Martins received funding to conduct a study at Crossroads, tracking the food consumption and general health status of individuals who used the agency's services. The study results showed that the people who were homeless experienced food insecurity and had higher medical risks connected to poor nutrition. This information inspired her to find a solution. With Crossroads, Dr. Martins applied for and received a \$5000 planning grant from the Rhode Island Foundation (RIF). This funding enabled her to hire a consultant who would help to design a larger project with a focus on developing solutions to this problem.

Through the planning grant, a team was brought together in 2006, including faculty from the University of Rhode Island and representatives from the RI Coalition for the Homeless, Johnson & Wales University, the RI Department of Human Services (DHS), and the URI Partnership in Food, Hunger and Nutrition. Representing DHS was Robert McDonough, who at the time was the Administrator of Family and Adult Services at DHS. Through this effort, a range of possibilities were explored that might help improve access to food for people who were homeless, including improving meals at meal sites, (i.e., soup kitchens), working with Meals On Wheels, and changes to federal assistance programs. Mr. McDonough, who had program responsibility for the Food Stamp Program at DHS, suggested that rather than create a new program, the group take advantage of an existing program available through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) is an option for states within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. SNAP allows particular populations (i.e. people who are homeless, elderly, and people with disabilities) to use their SNAP/Food Stamp benefits to purchase hot, prepared-meals at specially contracted restaurants. The intent of this program is to increase access to food for the target populations who often do not have the facilities to make meals and/or store food. Although very few states have chosen to implement this program, it provides a way to address the concerns around nutrition among homeless individuals as well as people with disabilities and the elderly.

While initially the planning group was exploring several different options, the members gradually began to focus on the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program as the focus of their work as it seemed to provide the best opportunity for success. Working together, they began to research the requirements for the program, contacting the FNS regional office and the program administrators in states that had successfully initiated a Restaurant Meals Program. Support from the program officer at the Rhode Island Foundation for this program was also instrumental in keeping the project focused. From this time forward, the working group was comprised of Jim Ryczek, Kathleen Gorman, Diane Martins, and Robert McDonough, who called their efforts (and themselves) the Food Access Project. With the help of the consultant, a series of focus groups with homeless individuals and their service providers were conducted to get first-hand knowledge about the issues facing the target population. While the research and planning for the potential Restaurant Meals Program was ongoing, Mr. McDonough retired from State service. Shortly after his retirement, he was able to secure a

commitment to the RMP from the Director of DHS, Gary Alexander, and this allowed for some continuity of the initiative during the transition. Additionally, the new SNAP administrator at DHS, Nancy Pellegrino, was able to take advantage of a Management Training Program in which she was participating to select the RMP as her hands-on project. This allowed her to work on the project and help the project to continue to move forward. Through the support of the RI Foundation and other grants, Mr. McDonough was able to remain involved in the project and work as a consultant to the RI Coalition for the Homeless as the project manager of the Food Access Project. In 2009, the RI Coalition for the Homeless became the fiscal agent for the project.

Building a strong case for a RMP in Rhode Island involved learning as much about the program as possible, including what other states had done. Food Access Project members researched programs in other states – California, New York, Massachusetts and Arizona. They learned that the Subway Corporation was a primary player in California, and because of Subway's history of cooperation and offering of wholesome foods, the Food Access Project decided to pursue the participation of Subway in RMP in Rhode Island. Thomas Messa, a Senior Field Consultant for the Subway Corporation was contacted and asked about his interest in becoming involved in the initiative. He was enthusiastic from the start. Eventually, as the program was launched several years later, Mr. Messa was instrumental in working with the retailers at selected locations to explain the program to them and to help with the USDA FNS agreements and DHS contracts as well as the EBT protocols.

Between 2008 and 2010 the team applied for several grants to fund the ongoing development of a pilot program. They were successful in attracting grants from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Southern RI Area Health Education Center, the Central RI Area Health Education Center, and the URI Urban Initiative. A subcontract between the SNAP Outreach Project at URI and the RI Coalition for the Homeless provided funding for outreach to SNAP eligible participants in the RMP in 2011. Part of these efforts included ongoing communication with the retailers and selecting those that were considered most appropriate for testing out the project. At the same time, the group worked with DHS to develop a plan that would be workable – which eventually led to the decision to start small and select a limited number of Subway restaurants within one geographical area (i.e., Providence) in order to test the project before going statewide.

The complexity of the program required an array of skills and reliance on a team of individuals, each with their own expertise and role to play. Mr. McDonough had a wealth of experience as the SNAP/Food Stamp Administrator at DHS as well as an understanding of the USDA FNS requirements. He was able to provide a bridge between the retailers, advocates and DHS. Given the limited resources (time and money) for DHS personnel, it was fortunate that he was able to assist in developing the state and federal protocols for the program, as well as the contracts between the State and the participating agencies. DHS on their end worked to assure that the electronic benefit transfer cards for consumers were appropriately recoded to mark them as qualifying for the Restaurant Meals Program. Participating restaurants had to fulfill the paperwork and licensing requirements in order to become authorized retailers and receive Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card reading devices.

In addition to the technical implementation of the program, a considerable education and outreach effort had to be launched, both to inform qualified SNAP users of their eligibility for the program, the locations of the participating Subway restaurants, and to explain the program to the public and to those SNAP participants who were not part of the targeted populations. Again with funds through the RIF, other grants, and a subcontract with the URI Outreach Project, an outreach coordinator, LeeAnn Byrne, was hired by the RI Coalition for the Homeless. This position was intended to focus on

outreach/education with both SNAP eligible clients who meet the criteria for the RMP as well as their service providers. The outreach coordinator was trained in conjunction with the state's SNAP Outreach Project.

After months and years of planning, a pilot of the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program was launched in August 2011. The program got off to a good start with participants eagerly arriving at the Subway restaurants ready to use their EBT cards for a Subway sandwich. As with all new programs, there were a few glitches, with some non-qualifying SNAP participants trying to use their cards at Subway and some SNAP participants, both qualifying and not, trying to use their EBT cards at non-participating Subways outside of the pilot area. Concurrently to the launch of the pilot, a major problem with all EBT cards occurred. Concerned that the specially coded EBT cards for the Restaurant Meals Program might be causing the problem, the program was temporarily halted. The problem with the cards was resolved and the Restaurant Meals Program began again in October 2011.

Currently the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program continues as a pilot at four Subway restaurants in Providence and one in nearby Cranston. It is being used to varying degrees by all three target populations and by location. The program is managed by an Implementation Team formed at the request of DHS Director Sandra Powell. The Implementation Team is co-chaired by Robert McDonough, Project Manager for the RI Coalition for the Homeless, and Nancy Pellegrino, DHS SNAP Administrator. Members include LeeAnn Byrne, Food Access Project Outreach Coordinator for the RI Coalition for the Homeless; William O'Donnell, DHS SNAP Corrective Action Specialist; Christine Ruggieri, DHS Director of Staff Development; Perry Gast, Healthy Food Systems Specialist, DOH; and Thomas Messa, Senior Field Consultant, Subway Development Group.

Need for Program

As stated in the section on the history of the program, the need for better access to nutritious food for homeless persons was first identified by Dr. Martins in her work at Crossroads RI. The subsequent study that she completed with homeless individuals at Crossroads in 2004 had the following findings:

- Their diet was extraordinarily high in fat and saturated fat.
- 75% did not consume any fruits, vegetables, or dairy foods.
- 43% were obese and another 34% overweight.
- 77% had elevated risk of cardiovascular disease.
- 84.5% were food insecure and at extraordinary nutrition risk.
- 67% reported food insecurity with hunger.

The study also looked at these homeless individuals' use of Food Stamps and other meal programs, and found that:

- More than half depended on soup kitchens and shelters to obtain food every day.
- Because they were dependent on charity meal sites for their food, many did not eat at all during a day when they were sick, the weather was bad, or they did not have transportation.
- Only 54% were participating in the Food Stamp program, even though all were presumptively eligible.
- There were no significant differences regarding food security based on usage or non-usage of Food Stamps.

- Food obtained through Food Stamps or through food pantries could not be properly utilized because they did not have any place to store, refrigerate, or prepare food.

Starting during the planning grant phase, and continuing throughout the project's trajectory, ten focus groups were conducted with homeless persons, as well as some elders and people with disabilities. Initially the focus groups were intended to document the extent of needs being experienced by the target populations in securing their daily meals. Later on focus groups additionally explored barriers to optimal access, as well as perceptions about alternatives that might improve food access. There were several themes among the participants who were homeless:

- Frustration that Food Stamps are limited in what can be purchased, i.e., not being able to buy a hot item in grocery and convenience stores, but being able to buy candy and salty or sugary snacks.
- Buying "junk food" at convenience stores because you are hungry. Sometimes the junk food is the only food you have that day.
- Not being able to store food that is purchased in grocery stores, so that food spoils in your bag or has to be thrown away.
- Since Food Stamps are not that useful in getting food, some individuals sell their Food Stamps to have money for other necessities like soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, etc.; and some just don't bother with them.
- For those with mobility problems, the difficulty of carrying groceries.
- Having no choice about what you eat.
- Meals at soup kitchens that are not good for you because of your medical conditions, but you eat them because you are hungry and that is all that is being offered.
- Missing meals because soup kitchen hours conflict with jobs or appointments. Sometimes eating only one meal a day.
- Portions at shelters are small; you leave feeling hungry.
- Getting signed up for Food Stamps is difficult and time consuming. Going to the Dept. of Human Services to apply for Food Stamps is intimidating and demoralizing.

The focus groups also sought to probe how effective a restaurant meals program might be. Even before questions were asked about the usefulness of RMP, participants spontaneously commented on how good it would be to be able to sit down at a restaurant and have a hot meal of your choice. When specifically asked about whether they would use their Food Stamp benefits at restaurants, the overwhelming consensus was that it would be a wonderful step forward. Participants remarked on the ability to buy nutritious foods.

The proposed RMP would address many of these issues. People could choose what they wanted to eat. They could choose foods that were healthy for them and met their nutritional needs. They could eat at times that were convenient for them and not miss meals because of having to be at work or at an appointment at the only time meal sites were serving. Storing or cooking food would not be an issue.

While people who are homeless often do not have kitchens to store and prepare food, some elders and people with disabilities do not have the physical ability to prepare foods. Some have difficulties grocery shopping and carrying groceries. For some isolation is an issue, as well as a lack of places to go to be out and about and part of the community. RMP would be a way to address their needs and provide options.

Program Goals and Intended Outcomes

The proposal to the Rhode Island Foundation for a planning grant stated that, “The overall goal of the project is to design a pilot program to decrease hunger and food insecurity for homeless individuals and others who have no way of preparing food.” The outcomes were listed as:

- A novel and cost-effective system to provide food/nutrition to the target population.
- Increased food security for homeless persons and individuals who lack facilities for food preparation.
- Decreased hunger in the target population.
- Improved nutrition and health status for target population.

As the focus of the project advanced, subsequent grant submissions, proposals, and reports (between 2007 and 2011) consistently stated that the desired outcome of the Food Access Project was to increase “Access, by homeless, elderly and disabled, to prepared meals in restaurants would:

- Increase access to prepared meals
- Expand venues and times when meals could be consumed

With the decision to focus on the RMP, an additional secondary outcome included increased participation in SNAP for the target population. Similarly, secondary goals included improved nutrition and health, reflecting the underlying understanding that increased access to food among populations who struggle to eat could potentially have long term consequences on their health and nutrition.

According to the USDA/FNS, the RMP is intended to increase access to food, a goal consistent with that of the Food Access Project.

Program Data

The Dept. of Human Services has been providing data on the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program. Initially David Alves from DHS had been producing reports for the Food Access Project Implementation Team. When Mr. Alves left DHS in mid-2012, William O'Donnell began to provide the monthly reports. The information below is from their reports.

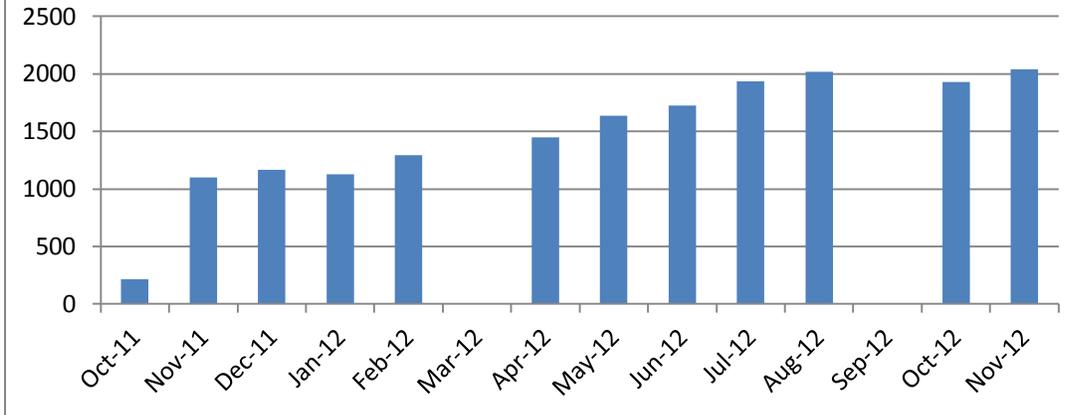
	Monthly Transactions	Increase over Previous Month	
		Number	Percent
October 2011*	216		
November 2011	1100	884	409%
December 2011	1169	69	6%
January 2012	1126	-43	-4%
February 2012	1292	166	15%
March 2012	Not available		
April 2012	1448	156**	12%**
May 2012	1637	189	13%
June 2012	1727	90	5%
July 2012	1934	207	12%
August 2012	2021	87	4.5%
September 2012	Not available		
October 2012	1932	-89***	-4%***
November 2012	2043	111	6%

*The program re-started in mid-October; these figures do not represent a full month of activity.

**Change from February 2012

***Change from August 2012

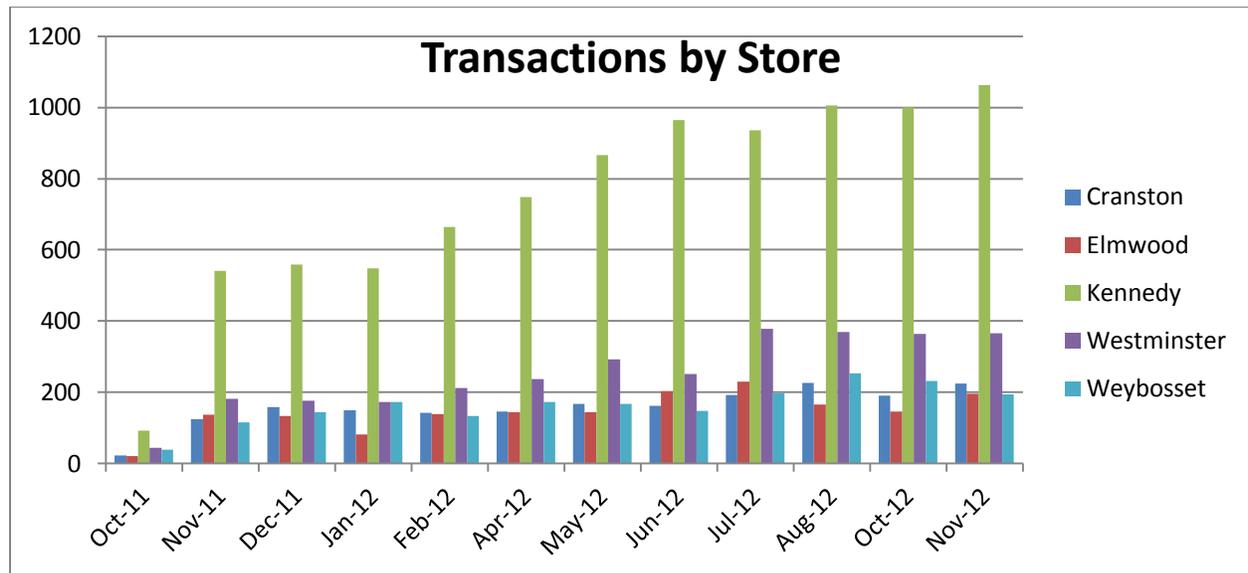
Change in Number of Transactions from Oct 2011 to Nov 2012



In the thirteen month period of November 2011 through November 2012 transactions grew by 86%. The trend in this period is an upward growth, with a dip of 4% each in the months of January and October 2012.

Each store experienced a similar growth pattern, although the size and frequency of the dips were not equal to the overall pattern.

As the chart below shows, the five Subway stores had varying levels of Food Access Project transactions.

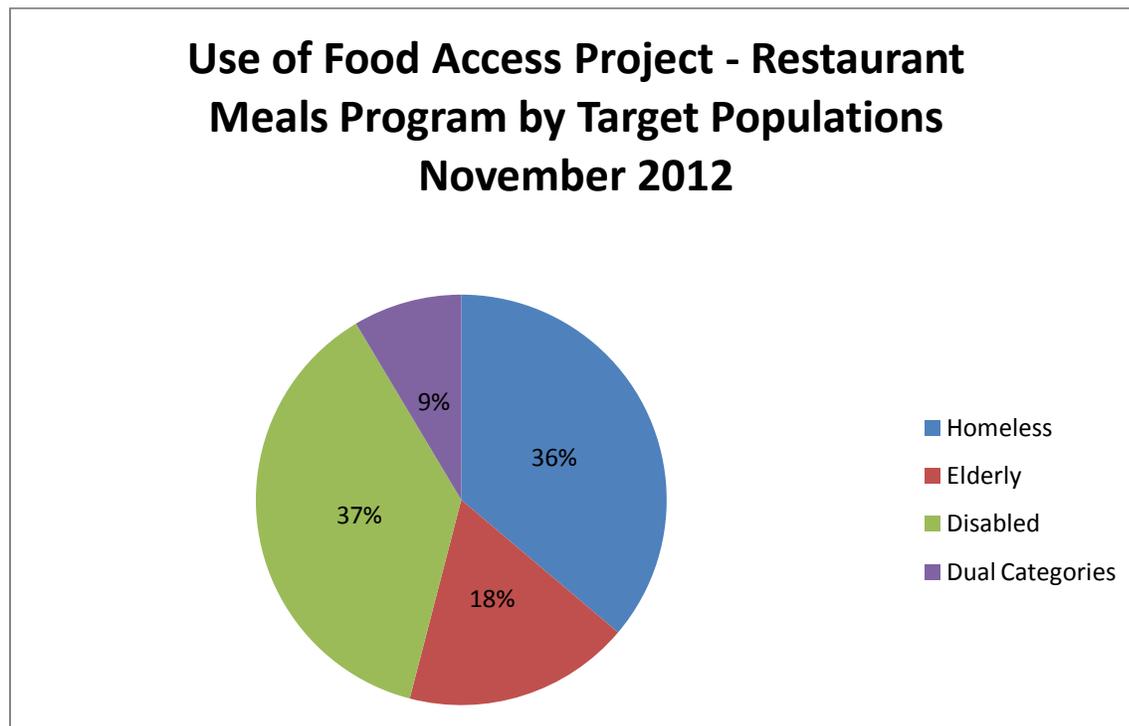


In November 2012, each store's percentage of total transactions was as follows.

Cranston Street	11.0 %
Elmwood Avenue	9.6 %
Kennedy Plaza	52.0 %
Westminster Street	17.9 %
Weybosset Street	9.5 %

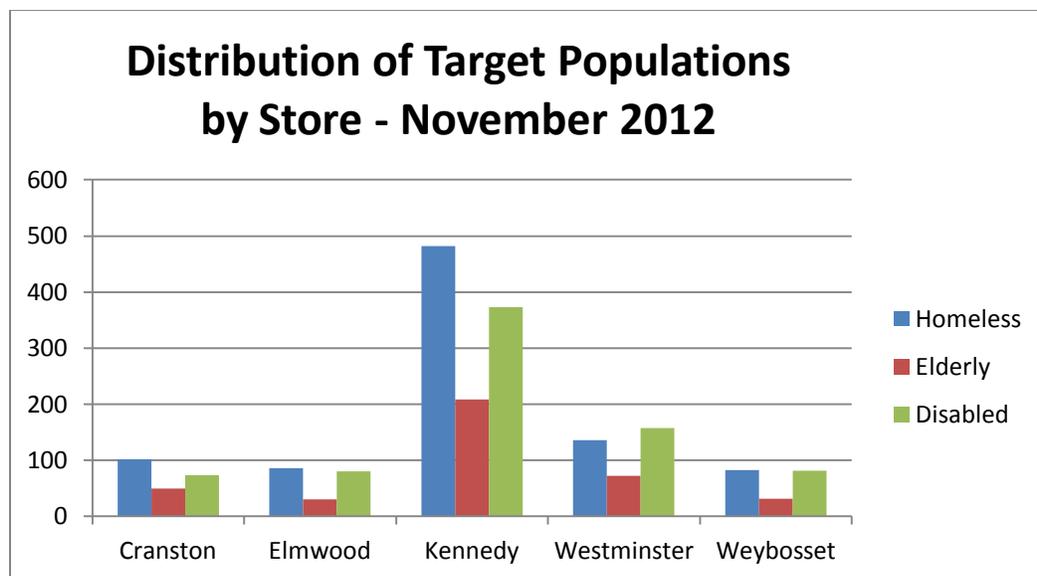
While all locations were planned because of their proximity to targeted populations, the Kennedy Plaza store is most centrally located, being at the hub for bus transportation. The Westminster Street store is close to both Crossroads RI, a multiservice center for the homeless, and St. Elizabeth's Place, a high-rise for elders and individuals with disabilities.

In November 2012, 36% of the 2043 transactions were completed by people who were homeless, 18% by elders, 37% by people with disabilities, and 9% by individuals who fit into two categories, i.e., elder and homeless (6 individuals), elder and disabled (26 individuals), homeless and disabled (143 individuals). This compares with a RMP eligible population distribution (at the end of February 2012) of 11% homeless, 46% elder, and 43% disabled. It should be noted that this pattern of usage is consistent with what is known about the target populations. The group with the highest need for access to meals is the homeless population, as they are the least likely to have facilities to prepare and store food.



Distribution of eligible populations using the program differed from store to store. The chart and graph below show these differences for November 2012. Some of the variations in percentages in distribution can be explained by the proximity of stores to housing for the elderly and disabled.

	Homeless	Elderly	Disabled
Cranston	45%	22%	32%
Elmwood	44%	15%	41%
Kennedy	45%	20%	35%
Westminster	37%	20%	43%
Weybosset	42%	16%	42%



Data from URI SNAP Outreach Project Call Logs. Other data available reflecting client interest in the RMP is reflected by the number of calls received on the URI SNAP Outreach Project hotline between August 3, 2011 and February 1, 2012. Call log sheets for this period were reviewed. According to the logs, 342 persons had called with questions about the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program; by December of 2012, that number had increased to 719. Of the 185 calls for which a city or town of residence was listed, 155 were outside of Providence, with 20 from Pawtucket, 18 from Warwick, 12 from Cranston, 12 from East Providence, 10 from Woonsocket, 9 from Johnston, and 6 from West Warwick. The other 19 cities and towns listed had five or less callers each.

It should be noted that when the RMP was launched, in August 2011, the Hunger Center hotline began receiving large volume of calls from SNAP recipients. Due to the large volume, and the fact that most callers primarily were calling to find out the location of the restaurants, the Outreach Project installed a dedicated phone line that individuals could call to hear a taped recording of the restaurant locations. Individuals calling the dedicated phone line do not leave messages or any information about the reason for their call. Thus, no data were collected on most of the callers. The data reported on here is for a

subset of callers who called the SNAP Outreach Project hotline and spoke directly with an outreach worker or left a message.

Most of the calls appeared to be requests for information about the program, but there were a few comments listed as well. These were predominantly from people wanting the program to be available near them. These comments came from people in North Kingstown, North Providence, Warwick, Woonsocket, the Chalkstone/Mount Pleasant area of Providence, Narragansett, South County, East Providence, and Pawtucket. Some just asked for more locations and some for different restaurants.

Experience of People Who Are Homeless

Twenty-six homeless individuals were interviewed in October and November 2012. Diana Burdett of the Providence In-town Churches Association (PICA) provided a location for the interviews at PICA's soup kitchen at the Methodist Church on Mathewson Street in downtown Providence and at the walk-in case management service center at the First Universalist Church, also downtown. Bill Stein of the House of Hope provided access to Harrington Hall in Cranston, the state-funded shelter for homeless men. All the comments reflected below are the opinions of the respondents, using their words as much as possible.

The individuals ranged in age from 25 to 68; six were women; 4 were African-American, 1 half Native American, and the rest white. Of those interviewed through PICA, some were staying in shelters, but many were sleeping on the street.

The overwhelming majority of the homeless persons interviewed are very happy with the program. They like it because of its convenience and availability at times when it's hard to get a meal otherwise. But they also like it because of the quality and goodness of the food. One person after another talked about how the food was fresh, healthy, nutritious, made to their liking, and loaded with vegetables. Almost no one had any complaints. Almost all feel that they have been treated kindly, with respect, treated like any other customer. The Restaurant Meals Program at Subway is definitely a bright spot in a difficult life.

The program has certainly given the individuals interviewed more choice and access to healthier foods than they would otherwise consume with their SNAP benefits. For those individuals who were missing meals because they were not able to get to a meal site, RMP makes a big difference. Nonetheless, the meals provided through meal sites, which are used regularly by most of the homeless, continue to be the sustaining factor in preventing hunger among those who are homeless.

Most of those interviewed have been using their EBT cards at one of the participating Subways for several months; only two persons had used their cards for a year or so. Six had just started going to Subway in the prior month. Five of the persons interviewed were not using SNAP for RMP. In one case, the individual was in a drug treatment program where his EBT card was held by the program managers. Four persons were told they were ineligible at Subway and have had some difficulty straightening out their SNAP benefit issues.

Usage of the program varies. Seven use it as much as possible until the benefit is used up for the month; five only use it once or twice a month; eight use it 3, 4, or 5 times a month. Most use their benefits at Subway at lunch time, although a number use them for breakfast or other times when they're hungry and no other option is available. The vast majority of those interviewed patronize the

Subway at Kennedy Plaza. Some because it's where the buses are, some because they sleep in various downtown spots, and some because that's where the action seems to be – they see people they know.

As planned, all the participating Subways are conveniently located and accessible by foot to many of those interviewed. And of course, those that are taking the bus in their travels find the Kennedy Plaza location most convenient.

When asked what they liked about eating at Subway, most respondents remarked on the freshness and healthiness of the food. As had been found in Dr. Martins' study and the focus groups, many commented that prior to RMP, the only food they could get with their SNAP benefits when they missed a meal at a soup kitchen was candy, packaged pastries, snacks, and cold drinks – what they called junk food. They deeply lamented the inability to get hot foods from markets – rotisserie chickens were mentioned very often, as was a cup of hot coffee.

Also commented on was the cleanliness of the Subways, how well organized and careful the food preparation was, and the good service. Very important too is the ability to sit down to have a meal, to relax and not feel hurried.

When asked what they liked to eat, there were many different favorites. But people definitely had favorites – I love the BMTs, I love the spicy Italian, I love the cheddar broccoli soup, the chicken onion melt is so good ...

When asked if there was anything they didn't like about going to Subway, and if they had had any problems with the restaurant program, the overwhelming answer was no. A couple of people said that sometimes the lines were long and they didn't like to wait, but even this was a minor complaint. A couple of persons also remarked that they didn't like having to go to the register first to have their card checked out before going back to the front of the line to place their order. Some of the Subways have the policy in place that people using their EBT cards have to have them checked first. One person didn't like this because she lost her place in line; another felt discriminated against and made to feel less than the other customers. Two persons mentioned that they didn't like it that there were no bathrooms.

Asked how they're treated at Subway, again the responses were very positive. Only one person had a decidedly negative response, saying that the workers are unpleasant and even miserable. Two additional comments that were less than positive: "Fine, decent; some try to shun you a little bit, so you don't bother the other customers, but most of the time fine." "Kind of downgrading a little because I was using the Food Stamp card." The remainder of the responses were positive or very positive. They included: "Awesome, perfect, people are nice there, they greet you, they talk to you if they have time. Subway is awesome." "Fine, just like any other customer." "People are friendly; they don't judge you like a lot of people do down there." "Like a normal customer, respectful. I try not to go somewhere where I have homeless written all over me." "Great, but that's everywhere I go because I always smile."

When asked if they thought the Restaurant Meals Program was successful, all said they thought it was. Some of the reasons given:

- Yes, they have great food; they're good with customers, very polite.
- Yes, I enjoy the convenience of having healthy foods at your fingertips when you're homeless.
- I think it is, yes. Allows you to get ready-made food, hot. It's so hard to get hot food. Allow you to sit down and eat it.
- Convenient for me, healthy for me. Good business for them.

- Yes, a lot different. You can go to a restaurant, meet people, talk to people, sit down and relax; don't have to be in a rush like other places.
- Yes, in my eyes. Nourishing, fat grams wise and all that, very good for you, calories.
- Yes, like to see it at more places, like hot food at Stop and Shop.
- Yes, because you get a warm, prepared meal instead of donuts and snacks.
- Yes, nice to have it available to you.
- I would think so, from my experience. Helps me because I get a fresh meal.
- Yes, in every way – clean and maintenance, food, everything, very fast, quick, easy.
- Very; convenient, know you're getting nutritious food, nice to sit down and dine, helps with self-esteem.
- I think it's good; I think they should do it at other places.
- Sometimes I don't have money for food – it's a good thing that you can use your card. Sometimes there's no food until you get to the shelter. Thank God for the shelter, but you also need food.
- Yes, saves you a lot of cash. Sometimes you don't have cash and you're hungry.

What they liked best about the program:

- I just go in and quickly get a sandwich; I don't have to think about what I'm going to eat.
- Convenience and readiness.
- That I can go to one of my favorite places.
- Fast service.
- The fact that you can buy hot food or sandwiches with an EBT card; there's not a lot of places you can do that.
- Helps me eat. If they didn't have it, would go to Amos House, but just good to have.
- That I can get a prepared sandwich. It's difficult living on the street, can't carry it with you; buy stuff for sandwiches, goes bad or you have to throw it out; squishes in your back pack; have to find a place to wash your clothes.
- The food, fresh, convenient, wholesome, quick.
- Fresh, quick and easy.
- Cheap and easy to get to.

When asked about how the program could be improved, eleven said that more restaurants should be added. Other recommendations or comments included:

- I think they're doing a fantastic job. I never have any problems. I always get letters [from DHS]. If you are fine with them, they're good by you.
- Put out more information for the public. A lot of people don't know. I tell people myself. More public awareness.
- Pretty good the way it is.
- By selling hot coffee at 7-11 and Cumberland Farms; by selling hot food at markets.
- Should be able to use it at more places, like hot food at Stop and Shop. Subway is fine and dandy, but only so much Subway you want to eat.
- If they gave you free refills, instead of making you pay one dollar.
- More locations participating in EBT. Subway on North Main Street doesn't take it – right next door to Oasis.

Asked if more restaurants were added to the program, what kind of food would they like to be able to get, responses included McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC. Also mentioned were chicken and steaks,

healthy food like the Whole Foods salad bar, Friday's, Gregg's, D'Angelo's, Pizza Hut, Wendy's, Taco Bell, roasted chicken and mashed potatoes from Stop and Shop, home-cooked meals, pizza, Chinese food, burgers, fries, Italian food. Although a variety of food was noted, most focused on "fast food" and seemed to recognize that cost might be a factor in restaurant expansion.

It should be noted that hot prepared food from grocery stores/markets is not allowed by FNS regulations for the SNAP program. It is not a decision made by the State of Rhode Island for the FAP – RMP.

Interviewees were asked about their experience with getting food, both before and after the FAP – RMP. Individuals talked mostly about their problems preparing food or getting to a soup kitchen, but most did not feel they had a lot of problems getting food generally. Since starting to use SNAP benefits at Subway, however, most said that it's been easier for them to get meals.

Asked if they had gone without meals or been hungry in the past month, nine individuals said they had not, but other answers included:

- A lot of meals, lost six sizes
- A couple of times because the card has run out
- Maybe twice
- A few times
- Yes, a few times; when I was in Newport they don't have a lunch program, would go from 7 to 5 without eating until one of the churches has dinner
- Hungry every day
- Yes, maybe five times, I'm starving right now

Asked if this had changed since they started going to Subway, nine said that it had not changed, and the others said that they had missed meals less often since using FAP - RMP. Responses included:

- At least with Subway can go get lunch
- Past month has been better, now that I have food stamps and can go to Amos House and eat here at Harrington Hall. But last summer I was lucky if I ate once a day.
- Changed for the better.
- I budget my card out; I put \$50 aside for Subway and save the rest for supplies. I buy canned ravioli and heat it up at Harrington Hall.

Most respondents said that they use a soup kitchen just about every day and many more than once a day. Most said that they used soup kitchens just about as often as they did before FAP - RMP. Four respondents said they used soup kitchens a little less, as they were able to go to Subway when they were far from a meal site.

Very few used a food pantry, repeating that they had no place to cook or store food, so that food pantries were useless to them.

Of the five homeless individuals who were not using their EBT cards in RMP (one because he was in a residential treatment program and four because their EBT cards did not have the correct coding), three talked about problems getting food and going hungry. This number, of course, is not enough to make any generalizations, but it is interesting that they had the kind of problems RMP seeks to prevent. One person said he had missed meals at least eleven or twelve times in the past month and had lost a lot of

weight. He uses soup kitchens, but no longer has a bus pass and he often can't get to a meal site. Another person said he guesses that he missed meals/went hungry seven times in the past month. The third person said that he goes hungry six or seven times a week. He said that he buys Spam and stacks it in the bushes. He goes to variety stores in whatever part of town he is in. Breakfast is two hard-boiled eggs and toast. In two hours he is hungry again. If he comes to an appointment at PICA, he misses lunch. If he has an appointment at the Providence Center, he misses dinner. He is constantly trying to move around appointments to get to a meal site. "It's tough out there."

Another five individuals were interviewed in a group at Amos House. The interview was arranged by Stephanie Jones Pringle, a case manager. These were individuals who were living in transitional housing. Because their housing was not permanent, they were still considered homeless and qualified for the Food Access Project. Their responses were very similar to those of the 26 persons interviewed individually. Two of them had had difficulties initially in that their EBT cards were declined. Ms. Pringle was able to get the coding on the cards fixed and at the time of the interview they were using them. The Amos House interviewees had the same positive experiences as the other homeless individuals interviewed – they liked the fresh, nutritious food; they liked the way they were treated and the good service; they liked that it was easy and convenient and that they didn't have to struggle to find a soup kitchen.

The one real difference between the persons interviewed at Amos House and the other persons who were homeless, was that these individuals preferred to use their SNAP benefits to purchase food at markets and make their own meals. They had the benefit of having a kitchen to store their purchases and prepare their meals, therefore using their EBT cards at Subway only occasionally. Also unique among this group was the individual who had a son in Dept. of Children Youth and Families custody. She was able to use her EBT card at Subway to take her son out for a meal on those occasions when she was able to have him with her.

Experience of Elders

Eight seniors who have SNAP benefits were interviewed individually and six in a group. The individual interviews were conducted at Olmsted Gardens and St. Martin de Porres Center, both in Providence. The group interview was at Presidential Place in Cranston. Ages ranged from 64 to 87. Nine of the seniors were women; four were African-American and three Latino. Four had

Case Study: A Homeless Individual Using SNAP Benefits in the Restaurant Meals Program

Edward is a 51-year-old man who grew up in North Kingstown, where he lived until recently becoming homeless. He is a high school graduate and did three years of military service with an honorable discharge. Until two years ago, Edward held a series of skilled jobs, including welding, printing, machine operation, and industrial maintenance. After returning from the Army, Edward married his girlfriend of ten years and was married for twenty years until his divorce six years ago. Edward has two children, both students at the University of Rhode Island. His other family includes a stepmother in North Kingstown and a sister in West Warwick.

Two years ago Edward got laid off from his job. He was not able to find another job and his benefits started to run out. He began to have difficulties paying his rent. Coincidentally, he experienced five hospital stays for a circulatory problem that affects his lower legs. When he was first unable to pay his rent and had to move out of his apartment, he stayed with his sister for six months. But the situation became difficult as she has a family of her own and he "began to get on her nerves."

Edward left his sister's house in the spring of 2012 and, because the Army had trained him well in camping, he built a campsite on the banks of the Pawtuxet River in West Warwick. He was able to survive there with the use of a Coleman stove and food that his sister gave him or he got from food pantries in Buttonwoods and West Warwick. Once the weather began getting cold in October, however, camping was no longer a fun adventure. His sister's friend told Edward about Harrington Hall and brought him there in a van.

Although leery at first, Edward now sees Harrington Hall as a great blessing. He has earned the status of having a regular bunk. He gets fed every night and has clean linen – he considers this a big bonus. The other benefits of Harrington Hall are his case worker and the outreach worker from URI that got him enrolled in SNAP.

physical disabilities. All the opinions expressed below are the opinions of the respondents.

Of the fourteen interviewed, six use their EBT cards at Subway, three plan to but haven't yet, and five don't. Of those that use their cards at Subway, two have been doing so for a year, one for six months, two for 2 -3 months, and one just recently started. The individuals who have been going to Subway with their EBT card for a year go about once a month. Two of the individuals who have been using SNAP at Subway have used it four or five times, and the other two have just used it once. One of the gentlemen who has been to Subway only once has a disability that requires him to carry oxygen with him. He would like to go more often but was only able to go the one time that someone gave him a ride. On the other hand, one very spunky lady who was confined to a wheelchair because of an amputated leg took the bus into Providence on a regular basis and enjoyed using her EBT card at the Kennedy Plaza Subway.

When asked what they liked about going to Subway, respondents said that they liked the sandwiches, the food was fresh and healthy, and they liked having a change. They go at various times, for lunch after the crowd thins out, for supper. Those who were healthy enough to walk over to the nearby Subway said it was convenient. Others said they could only go when they could get a ride. As with the participants who are homeless, each had their particular favorite sandwich. Also appreciated were the vegetables "you could have piled on" and the freshly baked breads. All but one had no problems, nor was there anything they didn't like about eating at Subway. The one problem noted was when the EBT machine was broken and the participant didn't have any cash to pay for the sandwich. All thought they were treated very nicely and courteously.

All thought that the program was successful. What they liked best was that you could use your EBT card and hold on to your cash, that you don't have to cook. This was important to a person who said he was handicapped and couldn't cook. As to how to improve the program, people would like more restaurants involved, more variety of food. The folks who lived at Olmsted Gardens would like to see the Subway on Branch Avenue participate. Types of food that people would like included hamburgers, KFC, rice and beans, and wieners.

In contrast to the participants who were homeless, these respondents said that they did not have a problem getting food, nor had anyone missed meals or gone hungry. One person said that there was no problem getting food, but that cooking was a burden and that when you cook just for yourself you tend to just grab

Edward had tried to get "food stamps" before, but "just ran into a wall of red tape." He first went to the DHS office in Buttonwoods, Warwick. He was given an EBT card that was supposed to be activated, but was not. He then went to the DHS Providence office, but was told he had to go back to Warwick. He went back and forth between the two offices but was not able to get his card activated. When he got to Harrington Hall, it was announced that the SNAP outreach worker from URI would be coming. When she arrived, he waited in line and when his turn came, the worker right away understood what he was trying to tell her – she "saw right through the veil." Within two days she had his card activated.

Edward had heard "through the grapevine" that the EBT card could be used at the Subway in Kennedy Plaza. Even before the outreach worker came to Harrington Hall, he had done some investigation. Using the Pontiac Public Library's computer, he checked the website printed on the back of his EBT card. He also got a pamphlet about the RMP and the participating Subways at Oasis, a social service agency on North Main Street in Providence.

The Food Access Project has been helpful to Edward. He travels by bus to appointments and to meals at soup kitchens at Amos House, McAuley House, Oasis, and St. Paul's Church in Warwick. Although most of his meals come from Amos House and Harrington Hall, his appointments at times conflict with soup kitchen hours. The Restaurant Meals Program makes it easy to get a meal when changing buses. "The food is right there; I can grab something and make the next bus. Sometimes it's much easier to eat at Subway than try to time buses for Amos House. If Subway hadn't been there, I would have had to drastically change my schedule or gone hungry, which I've done plenty of times in the past."

Edward is now working with counselors from the Veterans Administration. He is very hopeful of finding a job - "I have to get back to what I'm best at – machine operator, industrial maintenance, welding" and a permanent place to live.

something – Subway was more nutritious. A couple of the persons used a soup kitchen and a food pantry. Only one of the individuals used a senior congregate meal site. The group at Presidential Place said that transportation to a meal site was an issue. They also said that the three dollar donation was a problem for some seniors.

Those who haven't yet used their SNAP benefits in RMP said that transportation was an issue, particularly for those with a disability; that they had just recently heard about the program, or that they didn't realize they could use their EBT cards at participating Subways. They felt the program wasn't advertised enough and that more people would use it if they knew about it. Although several people said that they hadn't heard about the program or had just heard about it, one Spanish-speaking woman, who had recently started going to Subway, said oh yes, she had read about it in her letter from DHS and had gone on their website to find the locations of the stores.

For those who don't use their EBT cards at Subway, one just said that he wasn't interested in Subway. Two persons said that they didn't know they could use it there. These two also said that they would like to be able to go to Subway because sometimes they don't feel good and it would be nice to go to a place and get food. Both these persons lived at Olmsted Gardens and said that they would go if the Subway on Branch Avenue participated. One person said that she had tried to use a Subway in Cranston and the one on Branch Avenue, but they didn't take her card.

One woman who lived at St. Elizabeth's Place across the street from the participating Subway on Westminster Street, had gone twice, but there was a sign saying you that if you're using EBT card you have to show your card before you order. She was very upset by being singled out and says she won't go again. She doesn't want to be embarrassed again. She said she would really like to go because she doesn't cook anymore. She sometimes forgets and leaves something cooking on the stove, so is afraid to cook and sometimes she just doesn't have food to put in the microwave. On the other hand, another woman who also lives at St. Elizabeth's Place and does use the Westminster Street Subway, is not upset about having to show her card ahead of time.

For the elders who were interviewed, participating in RMP is not so much a necessity, but a very welcome convenience, particularly for those who can't or don't cook. Transportation to the Subways that are currently participating is an issue for some. Except for the person who never goes and the one who was embarrassed by having to show her EBT card first, all saw it as a very positive and welcome addition to the SNAP program.

In addition to the statements of elders themselves, several providers made comments on elder use of SNAP benefits at Subway. Bill Flynn, the Executive Director of the Senior Agenda Coalition, said that people who have choices do better and that people who are poor and elderly have few choices left. Luis Jusino, from the Diocese of Providence, said that his impression was that elders prefer to cook at home, but would use Subway when they did not feel well enough to cook. Shayla Montalvo of the Elmwood Day Care Center also believes that seniors prefer home-cooked meals to a restaurant like Subway. She suggested restaurants that serve more ethnic foods like rice and beans, as well as chicken and salad. She said that not many people inquire about the program even though the center has a sign with Subway locations posted on the door.

In their interviews, Catherine Taylor and Aleatha Dickerson from the Department of Elderly Affairs noted that despite all the outreach work done with elders, there continues to be a stigma around SNAP. Some elders have an issue with pride and are uncomfortable using their EBT cards in public view. Others feel

that they do not deserve added benefits, that they are not really needy. They noted, however, that RMP is beneficial to elder nutrition programs; it has expanded the universe of options. For elders there are a lot of steps to go to the grocery and cook, so the program can be really helpful. It does not conflict with congregate meal sites, as a different population uses the program.

Experience of People with Disabilities

Four people with disabilities, who were neither elder nor homeless, were interviewed. Two were interviewed individually at the PICA soup kitchen at the Mathewson Street Church. Both have been going to Subway for just a couple of months. One said that he goes only twice a month because he has only a \$16 per month benefit. The other said that she had been twice, but prefers to shop at a supermarket. Both lived in apartments with kitchens. One of the two was satisfied, thought the food was healthy, and liked the way he was treated. The other person, like the older woman noted above, was very upset that there was a sign saying that if you are using an EBT card, you need to let the cashier know in advance. She, too, felt embarrassed and singled out, and says that now she only goes when she can pay cash.

Both said that they had no problems getting food, although one did say that he had gone without a meal three times in the past month. Both used a soup kitchen, one every day and one once or twice a week when the food stamps ran out. Both used a food pantry regularly.

The other two people with disabilities were interviewed in a group of five people at Saint Elizabeth Place, a housing complex for seniors and people with disabilities, on Westminster Street across from a participating Restaurant Meals Program Subway. All five in the group had disabilities, but only two were not seniors. Although all five have SNAP benefits, only one had used her card at Subway. The one gentleman and one of the women said that they cook their own food. One of the women said that she had just found out that you could use your EBT card at the Subway across the street because of the sign at the register asking persons with SNAP cards to check in at the register first. Another woman said that she had heard two people on the bus talking about RMP. But from what they said she thought you could only use it at the Subway at Kennedy Plaza and only during certain times. She did not know her EBT card could be used at the Subway across the street.

These two women, although they had not used their EBT cards at Subway yet, thought that the program was a good idea. Both women mentioned that the food was healthy and nutritious. Both talked about the convenience of being able to go across the street to get a sandwich when they didn't feel like cooking or when they didn't have the items at home to make themselves a sandwich.

When asked about adding restaurants to the program, "fast food" restaurants were mentioned – McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC. The gentleman added that these are places that "seniors tend to go; they're reasonable, they're plentiful everywhere, they have a lot of nutritional meals." Prepared foods at markets were also desirable to this group.

Like the elders at other interview sites, none of these individuals said they had problems with getting food. One of the women with disabilities said that prior to coming to St. Elizabeth's she had had times when she didn't have much of a meal. Now that her expenses had leveled off, she could plan accordingly to buy food. St. Elizabeth's Place has a congregate meal site, which all the persons in the

group used to some degree. They all use a food pantry regularly as well, although one of the women with a disability had a friend bring produce for her rather than going to the food pantry herself.

Experience of Vendors

All four owners of the five participating Subway restaurants, as well as the senior field consultant feel that the Restaurant Meals Program is a valuable program, worthwhile for them and a benefit to SNAP RMP recipients. When asked if they want to continue the program, the answer was a resounding yes. Asked if they would recommend the program to other restaurants, again they say yes.

All four owners said that their expectations had been met and that the program is now working relatively well. All said it was helping their business, although it was more so for some and less for others. Three of the owners were very satisfied with the program, and the fourth moderately so.

Implementation was difficult for the Subway owners. The problems that the owners initially faced included lack of clarity about who qualifies for the SNAP benefit. There was a lot of food wasted as restaurants had to throw away sandwiches that customers were not qualified to purchase with their EBT cards. A big problem occurred when the EBT system crashed and the program had to be closed down for a month. A number of customers came in with their cards, only to be told that the system was not operational. The program had been advertised, and then did not work.

Feelings about how much support was received are mixed. Some felt that they received a lot of support and noted the materials that were sent out and meetings held to provide information and answer questions. Other supports that were appreciated were damage control when there was negative publicity; working with the technology vendor to get the EBT machines up and running, and the software updated for coding the EBT cards of the targeted populations; and getting the word out to qualified SNAP consumers. Others would have liked more support and quicker answers to questions.

Although ordering of food by individuals who do not qualify continues to be a problem, it is much less than it had been at the start-up of the program. One store owner has dealt with the issue by putting up a sign saying that if you are using an EBT card please see the cashier first. (The normal practice at Subways is that you order your meal and then pay for it when it is delivered to you.) This has eliminated purchases by customers who do not qualify or who have run out of benefits for the month and thus eliminated the disposal of food that cannot be paid for. It has, however, stopped some persons from using their SNAP benefits at that restaurant because of their feelings of embarrassment and being singled out. Another of the owners does not have a sign posted, but asks customers if they are using an EBT card to have it swiped first, at least until he gets to know the person and then does not ask anymore. While these practices do cut down on wasted food, they are not actually permitted by the SNAP program and should be addressed more fully in the vendor training. Additionally, sometimes out-of-state cards are used and then the stores do not get paid.

Two of the owners said that they had had fears about serving homeless people and that they would scare away other customers, but that generally has not happened. Two of the owners, however, have had problems with negative behaviors of a small minority of SNAP customers. These owners also said that they were happy to be serving good, healthy food to people who needed it.

Other problems had to do with the programming of the EBT machine, and time spent on reconciling their cash drawers. Because SNAP customers do not pay tax, the difference shows up as a shortage in the cash drawer and has to be manually reconciled. The EBT machine does not work well with Subway's POS system; it gets confusing for employees – they're not sure which button to press. One owner complained that they were supposed to get training documentation from the State which they never received. One owner had his paperwork lost by DHS.

As far as monetary benefit, all said that they were making money, and for one owner, SNAP RMP accounted for one-eighth of his sales. Others commented that although they were making money, it was not as much as they had hoped and expected. But all agreed that the income was getting better.

There were several recommendations for program improvement. The main one regarded better communication to SNAP consumers about who was eligible and who was not. They felt that the communication should be sent to all SNAP users, explaining and clarifying eligibility for RMP. More publicity in general to targeted populations was recommended. One owner suggested a special sticker on the EBT card, particularly for those who were elder or disabled as their situations did not change. Another issue for improvement was better integration of the EBT system with the Subway registers and their point of sale systems.

Also recommended was more and better training, including a training manual, for both restaurant owners and restaurant staff, and for eligible SNAP participants. "What are the rules, what should they look out for, what will get them into trouble." Everyone should understand what's expected of them. The training manual should include a list of "who's who" with phone numbers. It gets very confusing knowing who to call. A better organized list of key phone numbers would be very helpful.

Another recommendation was more guidance; more technical support; more communication, particularly receiving more information from the State about the sales figures, so that owners do not have to figure it out for themselves. Expansion to additional Subway stores was also recommended, as well as to other restaurants as long as the food was healthy.

Owners were also asked about the quality of the data they were receiving. They responded that they would like more detail about how their store was doing relative to the other stores, more regular information about participation, and more information about the exact amount of their SNAP sales. The owners would like to see how much money went into the program and how much of it, by percentage, went to them. They generally would like consistent monthly reports, including bar charts, on all aspects. One owner said he would like to get paper statements, rather than having to look up information online.

When asked if they would recommend participating in RMP to other restaurants, all said yes, definitely. But they did have some advice: Potential participants need to fully understand the challenges and risks in being part of RMP. One owner would recommend the program because it's important to get targeted consumers nutritious food. The program was recommended for areas where there is the greatest need and accessibility and enough numbers to benefit the owner.

Experience of Stakeholders

Fourteen individuals, representing the various stakeholders, were interviewed. These individuals are:

LeeAnn Byrne, Outreach Coordinator – Food Access Project, RI Coalition for the Homeless
Denise Daly, EBT Coordinator, SNAP Program, Boston Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Services, USDA
Aleatha Dickerson, RI Division of Elderly Affairs
Irene Fuoco, Director of SNAP Field Relations, Boston Regional Office, FNS, USDA
Perry Gast, Healthy Food Systems Specialist, Initiative for a Healthy Weight, RI Dept. of Health
Kathleen S. Gorman, Director, Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America, University of Rhode Island
David Heckman, Program Development Chief and Liaison, RI Dept. of Health
Diane Coccozza Martins, Associate Professor, College of Nursing, University of Rhode Island
Robert J. McDonough, Project Manager – Food Access Project, RI Coalition for the Homeless
William J. O'Donnell, SNAP Corrective Action Specialist, RI Dept. of Human Services
Nancy Pellegrino, Administrator, SNAP, RI Dept. of Human Services
Christine Ruggieri, Director, Staff Development Unit, RI Dept. of Human Services
Jim Ryczek, Executive Director, RI Coalition for the Homeless
Catherine Taylor, Director, RI Division of Elderly Affairs

The consensus is that the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program is successful and that it is meeting its goals. Stakeholders from all sectors share this opinion and believe that the program should be expanded to other areas of the state as well as to other types of restaurants. One federal respondent said that Rhode Island could be teaching lessons to other states. While agreeing on the value of the program as a whole, each person, representing the various sectors, also had specific opinions on different aspects of the program and on how the program can be improved. Their thoughts and opinions are discussed below.

Implementation of Program

Getting the Restaurant Meals Program up and running was a long and difficult road, spanning from the first planning grant in 2007 to the start-up in August 2011 and re-start in October 2011. Only DHS could implement RMP, yet there were a number of obstacles along the way. Robert McDonough, SNAP Administrator and one of the early champions of the program, retired in 2008. The DHS Director at the time, Gary Alexander, left DHS in 2010, and between 2008 and 2010 the SNAP caseload increased more than 100%, so staff who remained saw their workloads increase while staffing was being reduced. Just when experience and time were needed to bring RMP to fruition, DHS was left short-handed, both in knowledge and available staff to complete the many tasks required. Fortunately, with the support of a variety of grant funding, the RI Coalition for the Homeless was able to hire Mr. McDonough as project manager and consultant, so that his skills and drive were not lost to the program. Just about everyone acknowledges that without his day-by-day work on the ground, the project would not have been completed. Assisting in the writing of the regulations, the contracts, the MOUs, working with their vendor to amend the SNAP programming and code the EBT cards, selecting and working with the restaurants, informing the targeted populations of the change to their SNAP benefits – all this work was done by DHS, with the outside support of Robert McDonough. And yet, several stakeholders, both within and outside DHS, and staffing shortages notwithstanding, feel that DHS took a very long time to complete the processes needed for implementation.

As noted by the Subway owners also, the glitch in the EBT system at the time RMP began created a bumpy beginning. Additionally, some lack of clarity on eligibility added to the confusion, as ineligible SNAP participants ordered sandwiches, both eligible and ineligible customers tried to use their EBT cards at non-participating Subway stores, and even eligible consumers tried using their cards at participating restaurants when the system was down. The SNAP Outreach Project's phones were flooded with calls as SNAP clients tried to figure out if they were eligible for the new program. DHS had sent notices only to eligible participants but not to those who were not eligible; as people heard about the new program, there was confusion about who was eligible and why. Additionally, notices from DHS told individuals they were eligible for the RMP, but to find out about the program and what restaurants were accepting EBT, they were required to call the Outreach hotline. Outreach workers at URI and the Coalition were actively promoting the program. LeeAnn Byrne, the RMP outreach worker at the RI Coalition for the Homeless, regularly visited as many venues as possible where eligible participants could be found. Everyone had the highest regard for her work and credits her, along with Mr. McDonough, as being important persons in the project. Once the programming problem was fixed and consumers began to understand if and where they were eligible, the roll-out of the program went relatively smoothly, all respondents agree.

Credit was also given for the completion of the technical aspects of the program, so that there is high confidence about accuracy and integrity – correct benefits going to eligible participants and being used appropriately. This is an aspect that is critically important to the federal FNS division and an area where they readily consulted with the RI DHS and the Implementation Team and, in turn, give credit to DHS and the team for getting it right.

Lessons learned include the importance of having a champion in the state agency that implements a Restaurant Meals Program, someone who will tirelessly push every aspect of the program through, making sure it gets done correctly and on time. Also critical is clear and adequate communication to SNAP clients about eligibility. Important, too, is testing before going public, to ensure that the EBT cards are working correctly.

Program Results

All respondents, from every stakeholder group, were happy with the Food Access Project - Restaurant Meals Program: "We're happy with the project," "I'm absolutely positive about the program," "The program is successful; it's getting results," "I think it's a wonderful program," "I think it's great." Respondents do believe that the program is providing another choice to targeted SNAP recipients and access to nutritional food for those whose access is otherwise limited, particularly for those who are homeless. All agree that the program is a success. From the data collected, it appears that the program is being used as intended, i.e., by eligible homeless, elders and people with disabilities. In terms of meeting stakeholder expectations, most said yes, some said they had none (not being as close to the program as others), and a few said yes, but – it took too long, the numbers are not as great as they had hoped, the expansion into other parts of the state should have happened by now.

There is some disagreement among stakeholders as to how many people should be using the program to consider it successful. On the one hand are those who believe the program has not grown to the extent it could have – not enough eligible SNAP participants are using it. Other stakeholders believe that quantity of participants is not the issue, but rather access and choice for those who need it. It should be noted that the very limited geographic location of the program and the limited number of restaurants in the program has a large effect on participation numbers.

In summary, the stakeholders agreed that:

- Targeted populations have better access to a higher quality of food.
- Participants have an opportunity to socialize when going to the restaurants.
- The participation of the five Subway stores is working well.
- The collaboration and communication between the private and public sectors works extremely well.

Additionally, there were a number of improvements suggested by various stakeholders. The key recommendations, those that were repeated more than once and that fit also with the experiences of participants and vendors, were: more information for all SNAP recipients about eligibility for RMP, a solution to the use of out-of-state cards, expansion to additional areas of the state and to more restaurants, and more public education about the RMP.

Cost and Value of Program

It is estimated that the one-time set-up cost to DHS to implement RMP was between \$60,000 and \$70,000. This included writing the regulations and completing the programming for the EBT cards. Staffing hours used for implementation are also opportunity costs in that the time could be spent on other projects. DHS respondents emphasized that these costs to their department were high, both in dollars spent and staff time.

The program was considered by most respondents to be cost effective, given the program benefits, and both private and public sector respondents believe RMP is definitely worth the costs. While there are no major costs to continue and expand the program, ongoing costs will involve monitoring the program and generating program reports. The Department will need to figure out how to fold the program into its budget and workload on an ongoing basis.

There were costs involved as well for the private sector, most notably the salaries of the Project Manager and the Outreach Coordinator working out of the RI Coalition for the Homeless offices. These costs were covered by the grants from the Rhode Island Foundation and the Area Health Education Centers. The RI Coalition for the Homeless, to the extent it wants to be involved in program coordination and outreach, will need to generate additional grant funding.

The Food Access Project - Restaurant Meals Project could not have happened without the participation and collaboration of the private and public partners. The collaboration is unique in its engagement of a public agency, private non-profit advocacy agencies (funded by a private non-profit community foundation) and private for-profit vendors. The common sentiment among all stakeholders is that, "Without these agencies, one without the other, the program would fail. It's not the work of one that makes programs like this successful. It takes the dedication of many members that makes the program a success." That is the benefit of partnerships between public and private organizations: Each has a role and agenda that is unique to them and that is essential to the project.

The original connection between DHS and the Food Access Project was maintained when Bob McDonough retired from DHS, but the DHS administrators agreed to continue the partnership. This assured an ongoing process of communication and collaboration on the task of implementation of the program. In addition, a unique collaboration resulted between DHS and RICH when the opportunity arose for DHS SNAP staff to be trained on the new RMP by Christine Ruggieri, as head of training and development for DHS, and LeeAnn Byrne, the Outreach Coordinator for the Food Access Project.

The partnership was formally sealed when the Director of DHS authorized an Implementation Team to meet regularly and to be co-chaired by Mr. McDonough and Nancy Pellegrino, SNAP Administrator for DHS. This team met twice a month initially and now meets monthly. The team is comprised of representatives from DHS, the Food Access Project Outreach Coordinator from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, Thomas Messa of Subway Corporation, and a representative from the Initiative for Healthy Weight at the RI Department of Health. Bill O'Donnell from DHS provides utilization data reports to the team.

Program Data Collection

Currently DHS, in the person of Bill O’Donnell, collects the data for the program. Monthly reports are prepared that include the number of transactions by each target group in each store. People who belong to more than one target group, e.g., both homeless and elder, have recently been separated out and counted as separate categories. Another recent feature of reports is the reporting of unduplicated persons who use the program each month. The monthly reporting allows the Implementation Team to track program growth as well as usage by targeted populations and volume of transactions at each store.

DHS is in the process of working out an agreement with the Subway retailers to allow the inclusion of dollar sales in the reports. The reports will be able to include dollars spent by each target population at each store- the highest, lowest, and average expenditures by RMP participants, and how these compare to non-SNAP participants.

DHS is also able to generate reports on how much benefit SNAP participants have left on their EBT cards monthly and annually. The data collection plan designed by the SNAP Administrator, with input from stakeholders, can also track how many people are eligible for RMP, their city/town of residence, how many eligible persons are using the program, as well as out-of-state transactions.

In the interviews, all stakeholders who had reviewed the data collected said that it was very useful to the program. There were several suggestions for additional data components. These included tracking repeat users, not only within the reporting month, but over time, as well as tracking new users.

David Heckman, from the Department of Health, said that it would be very useful for policy decisions to know how users’ profiles had changed, i.e., their eating habits, as a result of the Restaurant Meals Program. He acknowledged, however, the difficulty in collecting this type of data. Director Taylor thought that it would be useful to know in what way, other than improved access, participants’ health or economic status improved. Both of these types of questions could only be answered by longitudinal studies which would require the tracking of individuals over long periods of time and very intensive data collection. While these are interesting questions, they extend beyond the current goal of the program – which is to increase access to food for the target populations: homeless, elders and people with disabilities.

Mr. Messa served and continues to serve as a liaison between the Implementation Team and the store owners, understanding the needs of both and, when issues develop, helping to provide solutions beneficial to both.

Although not a member of the Implementation Team, an essential partner in the Food Access Project is its primary funding agency, the Rhode Island Foundation. Ines Merchan, the Grants Program Officer, provided the planning team guidance early on in the development of the program and ongoing support as the RI Foundation funded the Food Access Project.

The participation of Drs. Martins and Gorman as members of the Steering Committee, representing the University of Rhode Island, brings academic gravitas to the project. Not only are they advocates, but their advocacy is founded on research and expertise in the areas of nutrition and nutrition-related well-being and health risks.

The experience of other states as well as the experience of the partnership in Rhode Island demonstrates that for programs such as RMP to succeed, it takes the legal authority of state government and the moral authority of advocates. As the program planners have learned, a restaurant meals program is not an easy sell – at least not for the uninformed, those who do not believe in government intervention in social welfare, and those whose own economic vulnerability makes them resentful of benefits others may have. Advocates can often take more outspoken and active positions on a social issue than can the representatives of a state department.

In any partnership composed of different types of groups, there will be friction as opposing ideas and values are discussed. While several stakeholders noted various disagreements among the FAP – RMP partners, what is important is that all believe that these open and honest discussions resulted in better program decisions.

Continuation and Expansion of the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program

Information from Interviews with Stakeholders

All stakeholders interviewed believe the program should continue and be expanded. The issues or questions relative to expansion noted by the stakeholders are which areas of the state to expand to, how extensively, which restaurants to include, how to address public opinion, how to ensure nutritional quality, how to make expansion go as smoothly as possible, how to communicate expanded locations to targeted beneficiaries, and how to avoid confusing the public and SNAP participants.

All the in-state stakeholders, in the public as well as the private sectors, believe that it is time for the Restaurant Meals Program to be expanded to other parts of the state. Several feel that momentum has been lost and that the pilot phase has lasted too long. The respondents from FNS did not believe it was their prerogative to make a recommendation, other than to say proceed with caution and continue careful monitoring to maintain program integrity.

Some of the stakeholders believe that for the benefit of the target populations, especially the homeless, expansion should be to all parts of the state where there are concentrations of eligible individuals. These areas include Newport, Westerly, South County, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and West Warwick. Others feel that a slower, more deliberate expansion will make implementation easier and smoother.

One additional area of discussion is the selection of potential restaurants for expansion. Department of Health representatives expressed an interest in DHS taking the nutritional value of the meals offered by potential retailers into consideration. They expressed concern about the possible inclusion of those fast-food restaurants that are known for their nutritionally poor meal choices. Other stakeholders expressed an interest in making sure that restaurants offered foods that met the cultural and dietary needs of eligible clients as the program expanded. Stakeholders from the Division of Elderly Affairs emphasized that plans for expansion should be developed and coordinated within the larger context of food programs and initiatives for elders. Another stakeholder suggested that wherever possible, expansion should support local business and local agriculture. It may be possible for DHS and stakeholders to work together to determine a set of desirable criteria for future restaurants to meet in order to participate in the RMP.

One partner stated “we have worked together a long time; we know each other’s strengths and weaknesses; each served a specific purpose; and, as frustrating as it gets, we are already indebted to each other’s strengths.” What makes the work go forward so successfully is the respect, openness, and humor that everyone shares. Differing opinions are invited. Everyone is made to feel comfortable, even when their opinion is different from that of the others. And also - “It has been a lot of fun, enabling folks to stick with it.”

The open communication helped each partner understand each agency’s processes, making working together easier. One of the public sector respondents noted that it is always good to have outside organizations working with public agencies. Even when the organizations are oppositional, it is good for public agencies. It allows them to make changes when it makes sense, and to explain to the outside organizations why their ideas will not work when the changes cannot be made.

The cooperation among the public and private sector participants also fostered interdepartmental communication and collaboration as the Department of Health and DEA also became involved. As one respondent noted, “We all have shared populations. Open lines of communication certainly benefit clients, serve the public in the best possible way, maximize efficiency in the use of taxpayer funds, and ensure program integrity.”

As with the pilot, outreach to targeted populations, as well as information and clarification for all SNAP users would be necessary. As the program expands, public education and goal clarification will also need to expand.

Information from Providers

Questionnaires about the need/desire for the Food Access Program in additional parts of the state were distributed at a SNAP Advisory Committee meeting, a Shelter and Housing Providers Network meeting, and a Basic Needs Network meeting in Westerly. Questionnaires were also emailed to members of these groups who did not attend the meetings at the time the questionnaires were distributed.

The questionnaires asked the respondents about the populations they worked with, the geographic area they worked in, if they were aware of the Restaurant Meals Program, if they thought there would be any interest among the targeted populations in their area, had they heard any feedback from clients that would indicate interest, and restaurants that might be good candidates for participation.

32 persons responded to the questionnaire. Nine worked in the Washington County area of the state, two in the East Bay area, three in the West Bay/Central RI region, two in Central Falls and Pawtucket, three in the Providence area, one in Woonsocket, and twelve statewide. All but four knew about the Food Access Project pilot. All but one said that their clients would be interested in having an RMP in their area.

Some comments:

- I think there is a huge need for this statewide.
- Yes, but the restaurants would have to have very reasonable pricing.
- Yes – there would be interest in Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket, Cranston, and Newport in addition to Providence where the program is already operating.
- Yes, entire state. Homeless and people without access to kitchens to prepare meals.
- Yes, we are located next to a Subway on Broad St. (Central Falls). The area needs the program. There are many homeless individuals in the area.
- Yes, I am hoping it spreads to the rest of the state.
- Yes, especially among older folks.
- Absolutely. I also wish they could buy prepared food from grocery stores.
- Often get calls on our info line (URI SNAP Outreach Center) and questions in the field asking when the program will expand to other cities and areas of Rhode Island. Also at Basic Needs Network meetings.
- Definitely there is a need to expand, especially to areas without bus access to Providence, e.g., Woonsocket and Aquidneck Island.
- Yes, very much needed.

Fourteen of the providers had clients who asked them directly about RMP, when it would be available in their area.

Responding to the question of which restaurants in their area might be good candidates for participation in the program, Subway was listed by 13 people. Other restaurants were named, but none more than once, other than McDonald's which was listed twice. These included chain restaurants as well as small local restaurants and delis.

Summary of Findings

The Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program is considered successful by all groups of individuals interviewed - participants, store owners, and stakeholders. It meets its goal of providing better access to food for those without the means to store and prepare food, as well as to decrease hunger and food insecurity. These results are especially important for people who are homeless, for whom getting daily meals can be difficult and time-consuming. The program also increases access to healthier foods, as participants can use their SNAP benefits to purchase nutritious sandwiches, salads, and soups, rather than calorie-dense snack foods at convenience stores.

Representatives of the three target groups interviewed all genuinely like the program. They themselves use words such as healthy, nutritious, and fresh. They especially value the convenience of going to Subway restaurants, both in their proximity, and in that they can have a meal when they are hungry or when they are not able to get to a meal site because of an appointment, bad weather, or other difficulty. People who are homeless especially appreciate that they are treated with kindness and respect, just like any other customer. Many have become known to the Subway staff and enjoy the social niceties of greetings and brief conversations.

The much heavier use of the program by people who are homeless, relative to the number of homeless people in the state compared to the numbers of SNAP-eligible elderly and disabled persons, seems to confirm that those who have the least access to food are using the program the most frequently. Individuals who move from homelessness to transitional housing prefer to use their SNAP benefits at a grocery store. Although there were not enough of these respondents to make generalizations, it does seem to demonstrate that SNAP participants understand that they can get better value for their EBT when they purchase groceries. In other words, participants seem to be using their EBT cards appropriately in the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program, when needed most to get a meal.

Although elders like the program, it is not as much a necessity for them as they have more options, including senior congregate meal sites and, most importantly, a place to store and prepare food. Those elders who for various reasons have difficulty with cooking are most likely to participate. And as the planners of the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program emphasize, for seniors it is not the number of users that counts, it is that for those seniors who use the program, it signifies improved access and ease of getting meals.

The Subway store owners are generally satisfied with the project. They are happy to be playing a role in providing food for people who otherwise might be hungry. They are earning increased revenues, although three of the owners were hopeful of greater returns. The owners find the great majority of SNAP participants pleasant to work with. The small minority with difficult behaviors, however, are quite stressful for two of the owners representing three stores.

The implementation of the project had its difficulties, with the breakdown of the EBT system and the confusion about eligibility and participating stores. These two problems caused the stores to throw out food that was ordered and thereby wasted resources. These initial difficulties have been mostly resolved and the program is operating much more smoothly. A little confusion about eligibility still remains, but the amount of wasted food has decreased greatly.

The breakdown of the EBT system and the subsequent stopping of the program so soon after its start also caused confusion and disappointment for clients who had been anticipating using the program. In addition, it disrupted outreach efforts and caused uncertainty about the status of the program.

The public/private partnership was instrumental in developing the Food Access Project and is effective in overseeing the program. Members appreciate each other's contributions, as well as the openness that allows dissent and different opinions to be heard and discussed.

All sectors interviewed want to see the program expanded statewide to additional Subway locations and to additional restaurants. There are many inquiries about when the program will be available in other parts of the state.

Program improvements most often suggested are more information about the program to target populations and more clarity about eligibility.

Recommendations

Program Expansion: Expand the Food Access Project – Restaurant Meals Program as quickly as feasible to all the areas in the state where there is a concentration of individuals in the target populations.

Consider a two-prong approach to expansion. The first prong would be to include Subway restaurants throughout the state. The second prong would be to expand to other types of restaurants. Most of the respondents would like to bring additional types of restaurants into the mix, including ethnic restaurants, and small neighborhood restaurants. There are several reasons for this - access to more choices, nutritional value, and ethnic preferences among them. However, some would argue that it may be quicker and easier to proceed first with additional Subways in new areas of the state. This is a group that the Implementation Team already has a lot of experience with, who already understand the Restaurant Meals Program from Tom Messa, their field consultant, and their colleagues. They know what to expect and a number have already communicated their willingness to participate. As a liaison, Mr. Messa is well-positioned to help with expansion. He is familiar with the issues faced by the current stores and knows how to help the new stores prepare for participation.

That is not to say that efforts should not be made to include additional restaurants other than Subway. While this is certainly desirable, it will most likely take longer to implement, as there are several issues involved, not least of which is the selection process. There are discussions at the Implementation Team about whether to develop criteria for participating restaurants but this process will be ongoing and may take some time.

Relative to expansion, the California Primer on Restaurant Meals Programs recommends a contract process that is the least cumbersome and complicated as possible, in order that restaurants not be discouraged from participation by overly burdensome procedures. The Primer also suggests that local Chambers of Commerce be engaged in helping to identify good matches for the program.

Communications and Outreach: Continue ongoing and repeated outreach in as many forms as possible to the targeted populations.

Communication is always critical when starting a new program and in particular for complex programs that have multiple components and stakeholders. During this initial phase, DHS focused on the technical aspects of the RMP implementation while the funding for outreach to the vendors and potential clients was funded through a variety of external grants, with substantial support from the Rhode Island Foundation. As the RMP expands, and is offered statewide, it will become more fully integrated into the ongoing procedural workings of SNAP at DHS. As such, it will more easily become part of the routine communications: newsletters, quarterly notices, and websites that are used by DHS for all of its programs.

Initially there was a lot of confusion about the purpose of the program, program eligibility, and the particular places where the program operated. As the program expands, DHS along with the advocates will need to continue their efforts in education and outreach – focusing on working with clients, service providers who work with the target populations, as well as potential and existing vendors (restaurants). The URI SNAP Outreach Project has as its goal to increase information and access to SNAP and to assist in retention for those eligible. Frequently, income-eligible clients struggle to access programs, lack information about the programs, and believe that they are ineligible for program. The Outreach Project staff is well-suited to provide accurate information and assistance to the target populations. Additionally, when DHS eligibility workers meet with SNAP applicants, they will be in a position to provide clear information about a client's eligibility for the Restaurant Meals Program. Attention must be paid also to the correct coding of EBT cards for eligible clients, particularly for the homeless for whom there are multiple codes which in many cases may change frequently.

Working with Vendors. Providing support for vendors to develop clearer guidelines about the implementation of the RMP and training materials are essential.

Eligibility procedures: One Subway store has a sign requesting that SNAP participants check their card with the cashier prior to ordering their food. Another asks customers if they will be using an EBT card. Neither of these procedures are in compliance with USDA/FNS regulations and will need to be discontinued. Other stores follow the customary Subway procedure of having the customer order the sandwich and then pay at the end of the transaction. While asking for verification of eligibility certainly cuts down on wasted food when the customer proves not to be eligible, alternative procedures will need to be developed. Stores can check eligibility or availability of benefits remaining on the EBT card should a customer request it, asking for verification about eligibility is not allowed under USDA FNS regulations. The Implementation Team can help the stores develop a business process that does not violate regulations.

Training needs: Subway owners genuinely favor the Food Access Project. Mr. Messa provides a lot of support to the owners, and the Subway Corporation appears to provide good training in dealing with customers. As judged by their comments, however, there still appears to be a need for training, additional information and clarification of procedures and overall better communication between DHS and the vendors. Dealing with diverse populations may pose particular challenges and additional training and support in these areas would be well received.

Ongoing Data Monitoring

The data collected on a regular and ongoing basis are useful to monitoring the usage of the program by the targeted populations and at the five restaurant locations. The information on amounts spent per transaction and pattern of use, would also be useful for program integrity, i.e., that participants use

their benefits in the intended ways. Additionally as the program expands, it will be important to track participation by locale (restaurant) and region of the state, as well as by population. Depending on the decision of the department in terms of the type of restaurants, and if the RMP expands to include restaurants other than Subway, it might be helpful to report on data based on the type of restaurant as well. Finally, if the Department successfully implements an expansion model that includes nutritional guidelines for inclusion, these would likely need to be tracked as well. The SNAP Outreach Project regularly tracks data on the individuals they assist and the reasons for calls/assistance and they would be able to provide additional data on how the program may be working in different communities.

APPENDIX

- I. Questions used in interviews with targeted individuals and groups
- II. Questions used in interviews with vendors
- III. Questions used in interviews with stakeholders
- IV. Questionnaire used with service providers

Interview with FAP – RMP Participants

Interview Location:

Date:

ID: (Only participant initials were recorded.)

Age:

Gender:

Latino/Hispanic/Spanish:

Race:

Do you have an EBT card for the SNAP/Food Stamp Program?

If no: Could you tell me why you don't use SNAP/Food Stamps?

Do you use your EBT card at Subway?

If no: Could you tell me why you don't use the Restaurant Meals Program at Subway?

How long have you been going to Subway?

How often do you go? (In the past month)

What time of day do you usually go?

Which one do you go to?

How easy and convenient is it for you to get to one of the participating Subways?

What do you like about eating at Subway?

Do you get to socialize while at Subway, meet other people, talk to other people?

What food do you like there?

What do you usually order?

Is there anything you don't like about going to Subway?

Have you had any problems with the restaurant program?

How do they treat you at Subway?

Do you think the restaurant meals program is successful? In what way?

What do you like best about it?

How do you think the program could be improved?

If there were more restaurants added to the program, what kind of food would you like to be able to get?

Before the Restaurant Meals Program (Subway), what kind of problems did you have getting food? What were your needs?

Has that changed in any way since you started going to Subway?

In the past month, how often have you gone without meals, or been hungry?

Is that more, less, or the same, since you started going to Subway?

In the past month, how often have you used a soup kitchen/meal site?

Is that more, less, or the same, since you started going to Subway?

In the past month, how often have you used a food pantry?

Is that more, less, or the same, since you started going to Subway?

For Non-Participants

What kind of problems do you have getting food? What are your needs?

In the past month, how often have you gone without meals, or been hungry?

In the past month, how often have you used a soup kitchen/meal site?

In the past month, how often have you used a food pantry?

Interview with Subway Owners

Name:

Location:

Date:

- How smoothly did the implementation go
- What, if any, were the obstacles and challenges; how were they addressed
- Were your expectations met
- What is to be learned from the implementation; if you were going to give advice to another restaurant starting this program, what would it be
- How satisfied are you with the program
- Does the program work as intended
- Does the program work as well as you had hoped
- What works well, what doesn't
- What help and support did you get from the private/public partnership (the Dept of Human Services, RICH, URI)
- How did these supports facilitate the success of the program
- Are you receiving the benefits you anticipated, either monetary, or in serving the community, or other
- Do you want to continue the program
- Would you recommend participating in this program to other restaurants, why or why not
- What recommendations do you have for program improvement
- Were there any unintended outcomes or consequences
- Were these positive, negative, or neutral
- How did they come about
- What do they tell us about the program design or implementation
- How cost effective/efficient is the program

- Did the financial aspect of the program meet your expectations; are you earning enough on this program
- What was more or less expensive than anticipated
- Are the outcomes of the program valuable enough to justify the expenses
- Have you received any reports with participation data? How useful has the data/information collected been
- What data collection components should be continued
- What additional data should be routinely collected, how, and by whom
- How can continued data collection be used to improve the effectiveness and quality of the program
- Is there anything else you would like to say about the program

Interview with Stakeholders

Name:

Agency/Organization:

Date:

- How smoothly did the implementation go
- How did the private/public partnership influence the implementation of the program
- What, if any, were the obstacles and challenges; how were they addressed
- What is to be learned from the implementation
- From your perspective as a ... representative, what do you think about the program thus far
- Is the program successful, is it meeting its goals
- What about the program works well and what not so well
- Were your expectations met
- What could be done to improve the program
- Are the outcomes of the program valuable enough to justify the expenses
- Is it worthwhile (participant experience, time and effort, cost) to continue the program
- Were there any unintended outcomes or consequences
- Were these positive, negative, or neutral
- How did they come about
- What do they tell us about the program design or implementation
- Is the program valuable enough to expand and/or replicate
- What is the best way, including lessons learned, to go forward in program expansion and/or replication
- What will be the challenges in replicating this program; how can these be addressed
- How has the initial work of URI and the RI Coalition for the Homeless influenced the success of the program
- What about the partnership of these organizations with DHS, and the dynamic between the private and public sectors, how have these influenced the program

- What can be learned from this collaboration
- How can the lessons learned from this partnership be useful in expansion or replication of the program
- How useful has the data collected so far been
- What data collection components should be continued
- What additional data should be routinely collected, how, and by whom

RESTAURANT MEALS PROGRAM – A SNAP PROGRAM FOR TARGETED SPECIAL NEEDS INDIVIDUALS

The Restaurant Meals Program allows homeless, elder, and disabled individuals, who do not have access to a kitchen for food preparation, the ability to use their SNAP EBT cards for the purchase of meals at specially contracted restaurants.

The program is currently available in Providence at five Subway restaurants. As part of a program evaluation, we are also looking at the feasibility of expanding this program to other geographic areas and other restaurants.

If you work with one of the target populations, you can help us by answering the following questions:

1. What group(s) of SNAP eligible individuals do you work with?
2. What geographic area do you work in?
3. Are you aware of the pilot Restaurant Meals Program in Providence?
4. Do you think there would be an interest in a Restaurant Meals Program (for homeless, elder, and disabled SNAP-eligible individuals who do not have access to food preparation facilities) in your area?
5. Have you heard any feedback from your clients that would indicate possible interest in such a program?
6. Are there any restaurants in your area that would be good candidates for inclusion in the Restaurant Meals Program, i.e., restaurants that serve reasonably priced, nutritious food?

If you have additional information that you would like to share, please contact me. I will call you or come out to talk with you. Thank you for your help.

Kamila Barzykowski
401-884-9499
401-339-7661 cell
kbarzykowski@verizon.net

Your name:

Agency name:

May we use your name and agency name in our evaluation report?

If no, we will use the information you provide in the aggregate, and not identify you or your agency in any way.