

East Palo Alto Visit and Roundtable Discussion with Chairman McGovern

Date: August 20, 2021

Location: Ravenswood Family Health Center, East Palo Alto California

Comments below by Janine Bruce, DrPH, MPH (Department of Pediatrics, Stanford School of Medicine)

Good morning Chairman McGovern and the many distinguished guests here today. My name is Janine Bruce and I am a Senior Research Scholar at Stanford School of Medicine. In my role at Stanford I've had the great pleasure of working with many of the amazing individuals here today.

We have collaborated together not only to develop and implement local solutions, but to also bring important evidence of the impact of these solutions to community and policy leaders.

Across various studies, we used qualitative interviews and surveys to examine what works best for families and the individuals implementing these programs.

- For example, the first summer meal program in East Palo Alto fed both children and adults. Thank you to Second Harvest Food Bank and our Children's Hospital for making adult meals possible.
 - In interviews with parents we heard how much families valued getting to eat a meal right alongside their child. Some parents said, if I hadn't been able to receive a meal with my child I probably would have left all together. These important insights have led to numerous other child and adult meals programs in our region.
- Then in a later study of library meal programs, we learned that 41% of participants (n=161) were at risk for food insecurity, much higher than state and national rates. If we hadn't asked we wouldn't have been able to demonstrate the unique needs we face in our community given the incredibly high cost of living.
 - In interviews with parents we also learned that libraries offer an open and welcoming atmosphere not found at other sites. This is really significant given that many parents also described instances of bias or unwelcoming experiences with other programs.
- Knowing that meal programs aren't easy to implement, we conducted interviews with librarians from across California. We learned that despite limited time and resources, supporting food security and addressing the social needs of their members was an important priority for them.
- Finally, we assessed implementation of a mobile meal program at a local park. We discovered how much individuals liked programs in settings where they could engage their child in social and recreational activities, while also getting a free meal. So it was more than just the meals, it was meals + activities.

These are just a few of the studies that we have conducted over the last several years. Ultimately the power of this collaborative work has been the ability to disseminate these findings.

Several years ago California Assemblyman Richard Gordon visited one of the library summer meal sites. He implored us to build and share the evidence from this work. We, along with many other advocates from across the state, did just this. We shared what we had learned about this model with our State Librarian (Greg Lucas). He in turn allocated over a million dollars in funding to support library meals programs across the state.

In closing, I'd like to highlight the importance of working collaboratively to assess the impact of new and innovative programs not only to gain the much needed funding and support, but also to bring an important voice to the children, families and communities we serve.

Chairman McGovern, thank you so very much for all that you are doing to raise awareness and advance action to address hunger in our country.