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Centering Lived Experience:

A TOOLKIT FOR ADDRESSING
RURAL FOOD INSECURITY
THROUGH STORYTELLING

Elaine Zhang
Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow



Glossary

Clients:	people that access an organization's services
Client engagement:	meaningfully including clients in roles or situations where they can benefit from education or empowerment
Food insecurity:	the economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, culturally appropriate, nutritious food
Hunger:	an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity, according to the USDA
Lived or living experience:	current or past personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people. In this toolkit, the term "lived experience" is used for brevity
Plain language:	communication that can be understood the first time it is read or heard
Storytelling:	an approach to client engagement that involves sharing personal experiences. This toolkit focuses on sharing stories related to experiences with food insecurity
Supports:	resources that can increase accessibility and remove barriers to participation
Trauma-informed care:	an approach that promotes safety and healing by recognizing the prevalence of trauma and its effects on an individual

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Introduction

Introduction

Storytelling in its most rudimentary form involves conveying experiences in a manner that will resonate with other people. For thousands of years, oral histories and traditions have long been passed down in the form of stories. To this day, storytelling is still recognized for its ability to foster human connection. This is evidenced by a growing number of organizations that seek to implement storytelling programs as a means to engage with their clients and communities.

Many models of storytelling programs exist since there is no standardized method for crafting and sharing narratives. Some organizations choose to share stories through social media, others have in-person events or training. This variation exists because each storytelling program needs to have unique goals to fit the needs of the the individual community. Regardless of the format of a storytelling program, organizations that work with marginalized communities understand that sharing stories has the potential to educate others and humanize an issue.

For the person sharing their story, it is an opportunity to find power in their voice and reclaim a narrative. It is especially important for people who have lived or living experience of food insecurity to have a chance to share their stories since it is an issue that is nearly impossible to be fully understood without having lived experience of it.

In rural areas, food insecurity and poverty can have different manifestations than urban or suburban areas. Although public transportation can be difficult to access in many parts of the United States, residents in rural areas may live miles away from the nearest grocery store, making physical proximity a factor in rural food insecurity. Due to differences in population density, geography, and cultural norms, rural areas need tailored approaches for many services, including storytelling.

Organizations with storytelling programs have the ability to go beyond encouraging people with lived experience of food insecurity to participate

in a storytelling program by sharing their personal experiences. It is important to create opportunities for community members to be involved in other parts of the storytelling program like the decision-making process.

In this toolkit, you will find information that will help you better understand how to plan and implement a storytelling program in a manner that values lived experience of food insecurity and meets the unique needs of a rural area. Although there are many approaches to client engagement, I will focus on storytelling rather than general client engagement strategies. I will introduce 8 topics that are important to consider and practical applications for each topic that can be adapted for your program and community.

Following the summary of best practices, I will present a case study of Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC), a nonprofit organization in rural Cortland County, New York, and their approach to creating a storytelling program. I will discuss the lessons learned from one-on-one conversations with people with lived or living experience of food insecurity and my recommendations for SVHC as they move forward with their storytelling program.

The intended audiences for this toolkit are people and organizations who:

- Are exploring methods for client engagement
- Are interested in starting a storytelling program
- Would like to evaluate and improve an existing storytelling program
- Work with rural communities
- Work with people that have lived experience of food insecurity

Best Practices for Planning a Storytelling Program

Provide Adequate Supports

It is beneficial to have many people with diverse experiences of food insecurity share their stories. To participate in your storytelling program, people may have to take time off of work or pay for childcare and transportation. Asking someone to give up valuable time and resources for your program may be a barrier to participation. For this reason, your organization should provide supports to show that you value the time and expertise of people with lived experience of food insecurity.

Each program will require different supports. To make your program as accessible as possible, you should ask folks what types of supports they need rather than waiting for them to tell you. [1] Since sharing a personal story may be difficult, some people may decide to just not participate.

Whatever supports you offer for your program, be transparent about their availability. It is not very helpful to have a small sum of money set aside for mileage reimbursement if participants are not aware of its existence or availability.

Depending on the structure of your program, it may be appropriate to provide food for participants to support their well-being. [2] These meals should be

nutritious and meet their cultural, medical, or other dietary needs.

"There's a lot of people that are disabled in Cortland that can't get out and don't have vehicles, don't even have the extra money. You go to like a nine to five job... your paycheck goes to bills and especially now the cost of food. You don't got extra gas money just to get somewhere like that."

-Cortland County resident on participating in a storytelling program

Be sure to do your research and compensate participants fairly by offering a living wage or expert consultant rate in the form of a gift card or honorarium. Keep in mind that offering honorariums or cash may be considered taxable income and could affect a person's qualification for SNAP or other services where eligibility is determined

by income. When possible, let the storyteller choose their preferred method of payment. The cost of compensation and other practical supports should be factored into all grant or funding applications for your program.

Keep in mind that if your organization provides other services to people with lived experience of food insecurity, your supports and incentives should not be interpreted as manipulative or coercive. For example, people who access services at a food pantry should not fear a reduction in their food distribution or other forms of retaliation if they refuse to participate in a storytelling program.

"If you're having issues with food insecurity, then you're going to have...other issues. Like a lot of times people have physical barriers that they can't work. You know, that makes it harder for them to afford food...[and participate] if they can't get a sitter, or if it's during the day, and they have to work and can't take time off."

-Cortland County resident on barriers to participation

Applications

- Supports to consider providing:
 - Compensation at an expert rate
 - Transportation or mileage and gas reimbursement
 - Childcare
 - Language interpretation
 - Food
 - Relevant training
- Plan to incorporate supports in the program budget for any grant applications
- State the supports you can offer on all outreach and advertising materials for your program
- Ask people what supports they want and refrain from making assumptions
- Make sure all resources and materials use plain language

Include People with Lived or Living Experience

In a storytelling program, people with lived or living experience of food insecurity can and should take on roles other than the storyteller. Some organizations offer short-term volunteer opportunities to people that may give them insight into the decision-making processes. But still, a seat at the table does not necessarily equal a voice at the table. [3] There is a spectrum of inclusion and some approaches are more effective in deepening engagement than others. That being the case, your organization should evaluate current practices and create opportunities to meaningfully include people with lived or living experience.

Figure 1: The Spectrum of Inclusion



Source: Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership, Creating a Culture of Inclusion Guide

Figure 1 shows a spectrum of approaches for engaging people with lived experience and provides practical applications for each approach. The left side of the spectrum indicates a starting point for inclusion practices. As you move towards the right side of the spectrum, the opportunities are more relationship-based and focused on

leadership. [2] Storytelling is located in the middle of the spectrum of inclusion. Consider moving towards the right end of the spectrum by identifying opportunities to share power with people with lived experience of food insecurity, whether that is directly within the scope of your storytelling program or in your organization as a whole.

If you are still researching or planning a storytelling program, it is important to include people with lived experience of food insecurity in the process as early as possible. Don't wait until your entire program is planned out to perform a one-time consultation with the intended beneficiaries of your program. If possible, open up your decision-making process to people with lived experience to let them play an active role in shaping the program.

For storytelling programs that are long-term commitments, it can be beneficial to provide opportunities for training,

especially for transferable job skills or leadership development.

A more effective and sustainable way to include people with lived or living experience of food insecurity in your organization is to hire them. Try to have people with lived experience not only in entry-level positions, but in management and executive roles as well. Lived experience can be as valuable as professional or academic experience and stating so on a job description may encourage more people with lived experience to apply.

Applications

- Involve people with lived experience in the planning process of your storytelling program as early as possible
- Go beyond a one-time consultation and open up your decision-making processes to people with lived experience since they bring valuable expertise
- Create opportunities to hire people with lived experience at all levels of your organizations
- Adjust job descriptions to indicate that the years of experience required can include academic, professional, and lived experiences
- Go beyond advisory and unpaid volunteer roles

"I like the idea of being called out to sit in a panel, go to Albany, talk to legislators, you know, help things going in the right way to be changed, to be a part of that movement. It might not happen in my lifetime, or anyone else's lifetime, but it would be nice to know that I was a part of something that matters."

-Cortland County resident

Apply a Racial Equity Lens

The long history of marginalizing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities has led to the racial and gender gaps in wage, wealth, and homeownership that we see today in the United States. [4] The multitude of inequities BIPOC communities face increases their vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty. [5]

Even if the racial demographic of the community you work with is

predominantly white, it is still important to understand the need to apply a racial equity lens in the planning of your storytelling program. Given that racial inequity is a root cause of food insecurity, it is impossible to focus on one without addressing the other. [6] Therefore, your organization should actively work towards creating a storytelling program that will lead to equal outcomes for all people, regardless of race. [6]

It is important for everyone in your organization to be informed of the effects of racial inequity in the United States and to learn how to incorporate anti-racist policies and procedures into your everyday work.

Analyze your existing or forthcoming program with a racial equity framework. [6] Begin by assessing ways in which your program already applies a racial equity lens. Then analyze what the outcomes of your storytelling program will be for each racial group. Investigate the reasons for those outcomes and determine what actions need to be taken to promote racial equity. [6]

In addition to being intentional about including people with lived experience of food insecurity in a storytelling program, your organization should strive to include people of color with lived experience of food insecurity. It is also important to include the voices and expertise of BIPOC when creating a storytelling program since BIPOC have historically been denied access to decision-making processes. [4]

Applications

- Encourage organization-wide training in anti-racism
- Recognize that food insecurity is a symptom of systemic racial, gender, economic inequities, and take time to educate yourself on these issues and unlearn oppressive ideas
- Identify root causes to connect your organization's work to community problems and systemic issues [7]
- Apply a racial equity lens by analyzing and understanding ways in which your program does not lead to equal outcomes for all people and take corrective action

Provide Trauma-Informed Care

Food insecurity and poverty can be traumatic experiences and such events affect each person differently. When sharing personal stories that relate to these traumas, it is possible that negative emotions and reactions will resurface, leading to re-traumatization. Therefore, it is incredibly important to have a trauma-informed approach to storytelling.

There are a variety of online tools and checklists that can help you with evaluating your organization's preparedness to be trauma-informed. You can also review your policies and procedures to identify potential areas of improvement. [8]

It is beneficial to have all members of your organization participate in training focused on trauma-informed care or engage with other resources. Through this preparation, you will be better equipped to respond to people's reactions to trauma when they are sharing a story.

Trauma-informed organizations place priority on trauma survivors' safety, choice, and control. [8] There are considerations for the physical

environment of your storytelling program that emphasize these factors. A trauma-informed space may have seating that allows for personal space and well-lit entrances and exits. [9] It is a good practice to involve trauma survivors in designing and evaluating procedures and plans in order to integrate an understanding of trauma throughout your program. [8]

"Living in poverty, whether it's generational poverty, or just new poverty, we'll call it, that is a hugely traumatic thing. And all the same kinds of physical and mental health issues that come out of trauma of different kinds are exhibited by folks who live in poverty."

-Suzanne Krull
Cuba Cultural Center

Applications

- Educate everyone in your organization on trauma-informed engagement practices, even those who may not regularly interact with people with lived/living experience of food insecurity
- When collecting stories in person, try to have a colleague nearby for support. There could be various physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects when someone is sharing a traumatic experience
- Understand and apply the 4 R's of a trauma-informed approach
 - Realization, Recognition, Respond, and Resist re-traumatization

"It's very, very important that anyone that you have working with people, clients, or people who...are struggling...should be trauma-informed. They should have some level of understanding of how to deal with people who have been traumatized, and what comes up and how to...work through that. And I think if you don't,...it can get very ugly and nobody wants that...It could be another trauma for that person and for the employee."

-Jackie Bogart
Food Bank of the Southern Tier

Best Practices for Executing a Storytelling Program

Build Trust

"I used to be embarrassed to go up to the food pantry and I'm not anymore. People know me. And they're nice."

-Cortland County resident

Opening up about personal experiences with food insecurity is not easy when there is often stigma and misunderstandings surrounding the topic. When someone participates in a storytelling program, they trust you and your organization to responsibly represent their experiences. However, as mentioned previously, food insecurity can be traumatic and people's past experiences with service providers may have been less than ideal. Consequently, as you are designing or evaluating your program and executing it, keep in mind that an ample amount of time and effort goes into building and keeping the trust of your community members.

As you include people with lived experience of food insecurity in meaningful ways before the launch of the program, it is important to avoid tokenistic gestures. It is best to engage people in areas where their time and input can have the greatest impact on the storytelling program. [1] Other ways to build trust include clearly stating how you plan on following through with the

actions and ideas you all agreed upon along with keeping the lines of communication open. [2]

When implementing a storytelling program, it is necessary to establish and maintain trust with the participants who share their stories. Contacting folks through their preferred method of communication and trying to have the same person maintain contact with them throughout the process will aid in building trust.

Being honest about what participants can expect before, during, and after the storytelling program is imperative. When participants feel misled or surprised by things that were not mentioned, it can erode their confidence in you or your organization. Before someone shares their story, it is best to let them know key information such as how much time the process will take, what supports will be provided, and that they can opt out of sharing their story at any time for any reason. [3]

Applications

- Building trust when people with lived experience are making decisions with you as the storytelling program is being designed:
 - Ask people what they want, not what they need [4]
 - Do not ask about things you are not willing to change or implement [1]
 - State how you plan to follow through with agreed-upon actions [2]
- Building trust when carrying out the storytelling program:
 - Contact people through their preferred communication method
 - Discuss guidelines for protecting privacy
 - Be transparent about the process of the storytelling program and let people know what to expect
 - Clearly state logistical information in the introduction of your program such as [3]:
 - Estimated time commitment
 - Purpose of the storytelling program
 - What they will receive
 - A reminder that they can stop at anytime
 - Your contact information in case questions arise later
 - Follow up with and provide updates to people who shared their story
 - Build relationships over time by having the same person contact the participants in your storytelling program

Shift the Power to the Storytellers

Including people with lived or living experience of food insecurity in the planning process of a program can show that you value their expertise. Likewise, when actually carrying out the storytelling program, it is still necessary to provide opportunities for empowerment.

Keep in mind that sharing a story is a deeply personal experience and that no one is obligated to participate in the program. Therefore, it is important to maximize the amount of control participants have over the storytelling process.

Before a person shares a story, they should fill out consent and photo release forms. These are beneficial for your organization in case any legal issues arise and can also provide an opportunity for participants to exercise control over what information is shared and with who it is shared. It is possible that someone may only want their story shared with elected officials and not published in a newsletter. If someone was to share their story with a crowd of people, they should be able to request that it will not be recorded.

It is especially important to remain flexible as you carry out the storytelling

Some people may not be comfortable answering certain questions or sharing particular details of their story and it is okay to make adjustments to meet the needs of the situation.

program. Some people may not be comfortable answering certain questions or sharing particular details of their story and it is okay to make adjustments to meet the needs of the situation.

If possible, let people share their stories through a medium that they prefer. Some folks may opt to share something they drew or an essay they wrote.

If you are sharing stories through a written format, consider providing the option for people with lived experience to write out their stories in their voice. It may be tempting to edit a story to have a “professional” voice or include excerpts of a story among formal statements that

provide context, but the story can feel less personal as a result.

Depending on the goals and format of your storytelling program, you might want to include photos of the storytellers. If they do not want to share their photo, consider asking if they would

like to submit other visuals that relate to their stories such as photos of their favorite meal or a food pantry that has been particularly impactful on their life. It is best to refrain from using stock images as accompaniments to the real stories and experiences that people shared. [5]

Applications

- Allow people with lived experience of food insecurity to write or express their own stories and experiences
- Before collecting a story, have that person sign a consent and photo release form. The consent forms should be in plain language and allow folks to give permission for the different ways their story can be used (newsletters, advocacy, social media, etc.)
- Consent forms should also let participants indicate how much personal and identifying information they would like to share. Some people may prefer to only disclose their first name or remain completely anonymous.
- Be sure to give people an opportunity to review and approve their stories before your organization shares them.
- Do not use fake stories and do not use stock images. These can misrepresent the issues of food insecurity and poverty
- Be flexible. If having a conversation with someone with lived experience, let their responses guide the conversation and don't feel the need to stick to a script or prepared list of questions

Create and Maintain Feedback Loops

As you implement the storytelling program, you may notice that there is room for improvement. It is likely that participants also have feedback on their experience with your program, although not all people will share their feedback with you unprompted. You can further commit to meaningfully including people with lived or living experience of food insecurity in your program by actively seeking out feedback and providing an opportunity to shape the future of the program. Hence, feedback loops are necessary to ensure that you are meeting the needs of your community and are continuously working on building trust.

You can start by building the capacity to receive criticism. [5] Not all feedback will be positive, but it is important to understand that constructive criticism can demonstrate that participants trust you enough to give their honest opinion. It can also indicate that they see potential in your storytelling program and would like to see it improve and continue in the long run.

Explore different options for gathering feedback. Depending on the layout and goals of your storytelling program, you can decide how formal and in-depth the feedback collection should be. Having

informal conversations with participants can be an effective casual approach to receiving feedback. In situations where feedback on specific topics is needed, a survey may be helpful since all respondents will be presented with identical questions. [4]

As you apply the feedback received and make improvements to your program, it may be beneficial to join a network of peers that are doing similar work. Reach out to organizations near you to begin sharing knowledge and resources with one another. [6] It is important to continue learning and making positive adjustments for as long as your storytelling program is in existence.

Applications

- Seek input from people with lived experience and create feedback loops
- Build capacity to receive criticism
- Get in touch with other organizations and participate in a peer-learning network

Adapt to Meet the Needs of a Rural Community

"[If] we're talking about Cortland County make sure it's not just [the city of] Cortland itself and actually [have] programs for the county that people can actually get to. Because a lot of times, you know, not having a vehicle out in the middle of the country in say like Preble or Truxton or Cincinnatus. It's all part of Cortland County, you know, you kind of feel almost in a way neglected. And if you do live all the way out there,...your insecurities are very valid because now [you're]...so far away from Cortland itself and maybe even a food pantry that happens maybe once a month."

-Cortland County resident

Rural areas are recognized by their geographical isolation and less concentrated populations. [7] Barriers to food access include a lack of major grocers, financial insecurity, and transportation barriers. [8, 9]

Due to these factors, people living in rural America are more likely to experience food insecurity than those in urban areas. [9] Thus, storytelling programs that aim to include rural communities may need targeted approaches in order to address the barriers that are specific to that area.

It is important to rely on existing networks in a rural community in order to promote your storytelling program. Connect with community-based organizations and local agencies that do direct service work; they may be willing to share your outreach materials with their clients or refer folks to your storytelling program. Rural communities also have strong social ties and networks, meaning that word-of-mouth is important for advertising your storytelling program. [9]

It is also vital that you work on building

trust with tight-knit rural communities and include community members with lived or living experience of food insecurity in meaningful ways.

Community buy-in is necessary for creating a program that meets the unique needs of an area.

In a rural area, it is possible that not everyone has internet access; try to make your program accessible offline to include those needs. If transportation is a barrier to participation, consider going to existing spaces where people congregate regularly or meeting folks at their residence, if appropriate. [8] These communal locations can include libraries, food pantries, or agency offices.

Applications

- Make the program accessible offline in the case that folks do not have internet access
- To ease transportation needs, meet people in areas that they commonly visit or are familiar with
- Rely on existing networks and word of mouth to promote your storytelling program

"I know those people [that live in rural areas] don't have a lot of access to transportation and it's hard for them to get to and from stores because there's no buses that go out quite that far as to where some people live."

-Cortland County resident on engaging people in rural areas

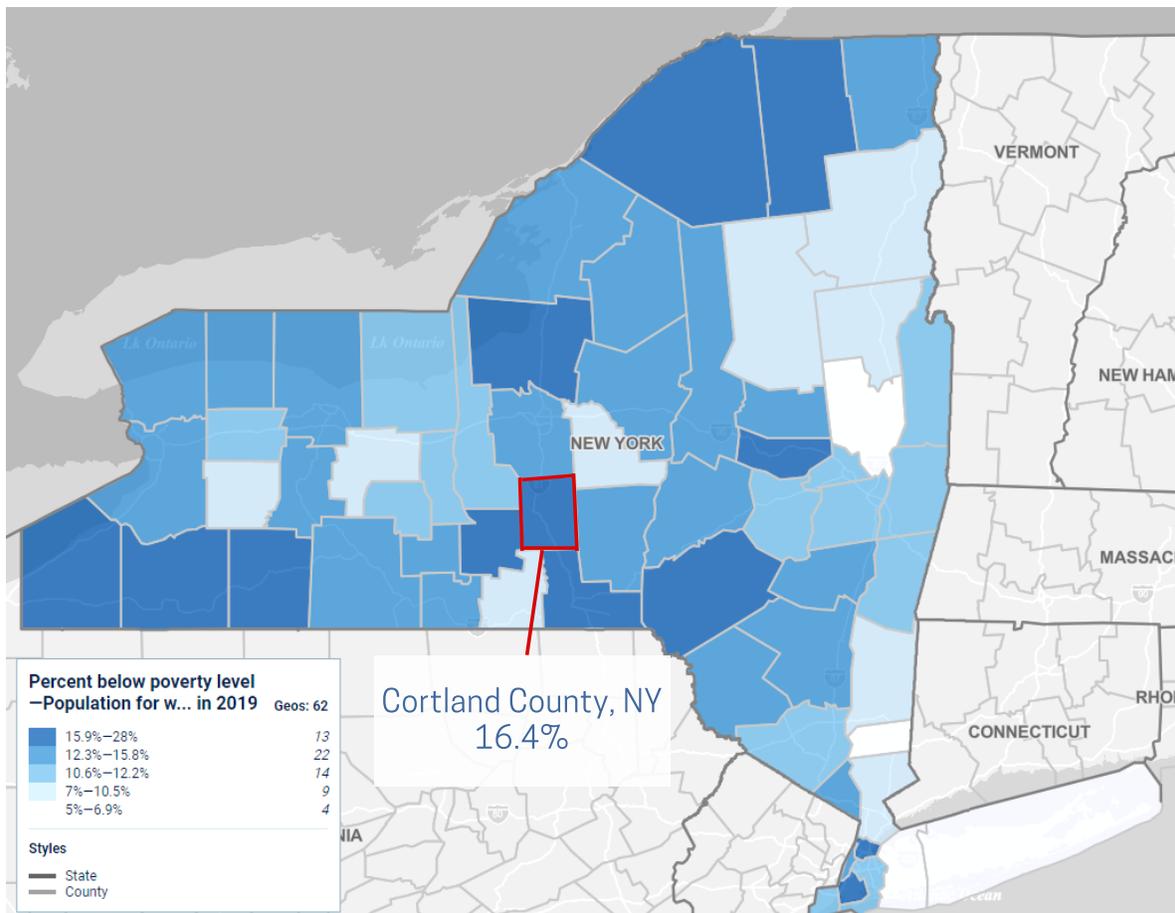
**Case Study
on Seven
Valleys
Health
Coalition**

Rural Case Study: Seven Valleys Health Coalition in Cortland County, New York

Cortland County is located in Central New York and is also known as the Eastern Gateway to the Finger Lakes Region, due its location midway between Syracuse, NY and Ithaca, NY. The county has 15 towns and villages and one incorporated city. The City of Cortland has a population of 17,556 and a poverty rate of 27%, significantly higher than the county and state average. [1] Cortland County has a strong agriculture sector and is also home to the higher education institutions State University of New York College (SUNY) Cortland and a satellite location of Tompkins Cortland Community College.

Map 1: Percent Below Poverty Level - Counties in New York State

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019



Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC) is a nonprofit organization that focuses on social determinants of health in order to advance the well-being of the Cortland community. In addition to providing community health education and subsidized transportation, SVHC addresses food systems needs in Cortland County by promoting local food and agriculture, coordinating the Seven Valleys Food Rescue, and facilitating the Cortland Food Project, the food policy council in Cortland County.

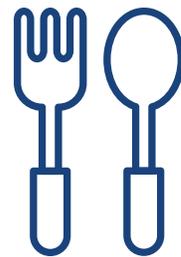
The Hunger Coalition is one of three subcommittees of the Cortland Food Project that meets monthly and brings the community together around issues of food security and food accessibility. The Hunger Coalition sees a need to include and listen to Cortland County residents with lived or living experience of food insecurity. To meet that need, the idea for a storytelling program was developed.

Cortland County By the Numbers



Total Population: 46,809

- White: 94.5%
- Hispanic or Latino: 2.8%
- Black or African American: 2.1%



Food insecurity rate: 12.5%

Number of food insecure people: 5,990



Poverty rate: 11.7%

Median household income: \$56,023



Percent of households with a broadband Internet subscription: 73.8%

Percent of population with low access to grocery stores: 10.72%



Number of households with low access to grocery stores and without a car: 457.51 households

Sources: US Census Bureau 2019, 2020; USDA Economic Research Service Food Environment Atlas 2015; Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2019

Creating Goals with People with Lived Experience of Food Insecurity

As a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow, I worked with SVHC on the research and development of a storytelling program. Soon after I began researching, I learned there are many different methods and formats for storytelling programs, and to determine which format was best for SVHC, a clear set of goals was needed. To avoid making assumptions about the needs and wants of the community, we decided to include community members with lived experience of food insecurity in determining the goals and design of the storytelling program.

This required SVHC and the Hunger Coalition to be flexible with the program timeline to allow for the necessary planning to meaningfully include people with lived experience as early as possible in the process. We had a unique opportunity to engage people not just as participants who share their stories, or one-time consultants for an already completed program, but as people who truly have the power to shape the goals and design of this new storytelling program.

It was important that the perspectives and values of people with lived experience of food insecurity would inform the program goals. However, it would be disingenuous to say that SVHC and the Hunger Coalition did not have specific outcomes they would like to achieve through the storytelling program since they otherwise would not have developed the capacity to create a program if they did not see the potential value it has for the community. Therefore, it was determined that SVHC staff would hone in on one organizational goal and that is to:

Elevate the voices of people with lived or living experience of nutrition insecurity.

The Process

Since Cortland County is rural, many residents lack consistent access to transportation and 26% of households lack broadband internet service, it was decided that having one-on-one phone conversations was the most suitable method to engage people with lived experience of food insecurity in the development of storytelling goals. [1]

I started off by researching best practices for storytelling programs and building my knowledge base with what goals other organizations have set for their respective programs. In addition to reading publications, I had conversations with people who have led successful storytelling programs across the nation. I gained valuable insight on which elements of a storytelling program are absolutely necessary, like trauma-informed care and adequate supports for participants. As someone who has not been a part of the Cortland County community for an extended period of time, it was paramount for me to connect with community leaders to inform my understanding of the community and service provider landscape.

It was important for me to understand how to provide trauma-informed care because I discussed the goals of the storytelling program with people with lived experience of food insecurity. There is a lot of unpredictability when talking about traumatizing events like food insecurity and I felt that training in trauma-informed care would make me feel more prepared to navigate those one-on-one phone conversations. Prior to engaging with community members, I read Klinik Community Health Centre's Trauma-Informed Toolkit and watched two recordings of trauma-informed care trainings.

After researching and gathering information, I developed an outreach strategy to advertise the opportunity for community members with lived experience of food insecurity to help shape the storytelling program. I began by determining what materials and information I needed to present to my audience when collecting feedback on the goals of the storytelling program, and what outreach methods would be the most effective to enlist community members with lived experience of food insecurity in the project.

The most information-dense outreach material was the email template (see Appendix A) that was used to ask local organizations and agencies to share our information with their clients who may have lived or living experience of food insecurity.

This email template included:

- An Introduction of myself, SVHC, and the storytelling program
- An explanation of what a storytelling program is
- A statement of why we want to learn about food insecurity from people with lived experience
- The method and dates of participation along with estimated time commitment (20-40 minute phone call in December 2021 to January 2022)
- The supports offered (\$20 grocery gift card)
- A request for them to share the attached materials online or in-person with clients who may be interested in participating
- A description of the materials in the media toolkit that was attached to the email as a ZIP file
 - Flyers in multiple sizes (8.5 x 11 in., 11 x 17 in., 1080 x 1080 px) and a text file
- A link for a google form to sign-up to participate
- My contact information

These outreach emails were sent to all members of Cortland County's food policy council and shared with 2-1-1- Cortland Information and Referral Service listserv for Cortland County which has an audience of over 600 emails of community members including health and human service providers in Cortland County and the surrounding region. The media toolkit included flyers of various sizes and formats to preclude the recipients of the email from having to resize them. In order to promote sharing the storytelling information on social media, I included a 1080 x 1080 pixel graphic and a text file that contains a short description that can serve as the caption for a social media post. The media toolkit was also saved to a Google Drive folder and linked to the email in case recipients were unable to unzip the file.

In addition to sending digital flyers in emails, I also strategically posted flyers with pull tabs (see Appendix B) in bus shelters and on bulletin boards at low-income housing units. Some of our community partners printed out the flyers and distributed them at food pantries and other health and human service organization locations.

Information that the flyer included:

- A call for participants to provide input on a new storytelling program
- A definition of food insecurity
- A description of who was eligible to provide input
- The method and dates of participation along with estimated time commitment
- The supports offered
- Contact information
 - My first name
 - Email address
 - SVHC office phone number and my Google Voice number
- QR code that leads to the google sign-up form
- Tinyurl link that leads to the google sign-up form
- SVHC logo
- For printed flyers: pull-tabs with my Google Voice phone number

Given that the flyers are meant to be seen by people with lived experience of food insecurity, I provided a few ways for people to reach out and express interest in having a conversation. Additionally, it was important to use plain language throughout the flyer to address potentially limited reading comprehension levels and define the term “food insecurity”. I created a Google Voice number and a new email address for this program in order to make it easier for another SVHC staff member to continue where I left off. I made sure to state the dates of participation because flyers can be posted for an indefinite amount of time. It is possible that someone can see a flyer without dates in the laundry room of an apartment building years later and give you a call.

Tabling

Another outreach method I utilized was tabling. I received permission from low-income housing communities in Cortland County to table and talk to residents about the storytelling program. In a rural area, I found it important to table where people are already congregated since it gave us an opportunity to interact with folks who may have mobility issues or have not seen our flyers elsewhere. Each time I tabled, I was accompanied by a SVHC AmeriCorps member who had also completed trauma-informed training. As mentioned in the "Best Practices for Planning a Storytelling Program" section of this toolkit, it is important to have a trusted person nearby when engaging in activities that may bring up traumatic experiences.

"It would be great...to have somebody sit there [at a tabling event], or a couple of people sit there and say, 'Hey, this is, this is a new program. This is what it offers. This is how you be a part of it. Let us help you and in turn, you're helping not only yourself, but other people.'"

-Cortland County resident on tabling to recruit participants for a storytelling program

Contacting Local Media

Many people in Cortland County still rely on the locally owned and printed newspaper as a primary form of getting information. We reached out to the editor and sent a press release for the storytelling program. After some discussion and collaboration, our storytelling program received a full feature on the front page of the newspaper. We also considered running some advertisements in locally distributed newspapers and magazines.

Creating a Script

To engage community members with lived experience of food insecurity, I had one-on-one phone conversations with them. In those calls, I provided context for the storytelling program and asked a series of open-ended questions. I decided that a script (see Appendix C) was needed to guide the phone conversations with community members and keep the topics covered consistent.

The script included:

- An introduction of myself and the goals of the conversation
- A request for permission to record the call
- A statement that the conversation is voluntary and can be ended at any time
- An explanation of the supports provided
- A few warm-up questions
- An introduction to SVHC and definitions of food insecurity and storytelling
- An explanation of the plan for the rest of the call
- An explanation of the logistics and goals of a storytelling model, followed by a few questions
 - Repeated for each of the 4 models of storytelling programs we discussed
- A statement of SVHC's one goal for the program
- A few targeted questions on potential goals for SVHC's storytelling program
- Some questions about preferred outreach methods
- A closing statement that explains next steps
- A "thank you" statement

These phone calls had an average duration of 30 minutes. I asked approximately 20 questions of each participant. That number varied since the script was altered a few times to include more questions or improve the flow of the conversation. The calls were recorded and uploaded to a transcription software. Those transcriptions were instrumental when the data sets from the conversations were synthesized and analyzed.

The Findings

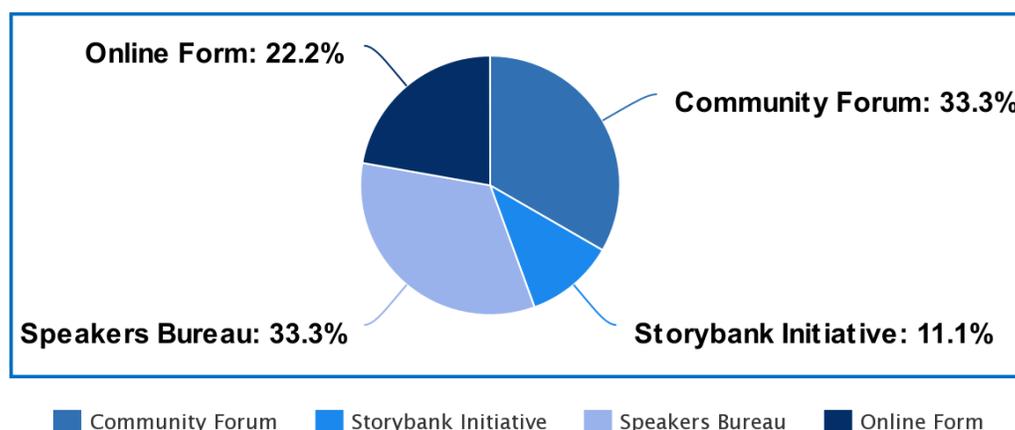
In January 2022, I had 12 one-on-one phone conversations with residents of Cortland County with current and/or past experience with food insecurity. In those conversations, four models of storytelling were discussed:

- Community Forum: An event that features people with lived experience of food insecurity sharing their stories for community leaders and other people with lived experience to hear
- Storybank Initiative: An ongoing effort to collect stories through audio, photo, video, or written mediums that are shared through social media
- Speakers Bureau: A client leadership program that trains community members in public speaking, media literacy, and how to share their stories in a powerful way over the course of a few months
- Online Form: A simple online form for people to share their stories or sign up to have someone reach out and collect their story

The key findings from those calls are summarized below.

Preferred Storytelling Model

"Of the four programs mentioned, do you have a favorite?"



Barriers

When asked what reasons people may have for not sharing a story or attending an in-person event, 75% of respondents named embarrassment or fear of judgment and shame as a limiting factor. 75% of people also identified a lack of transportation as a barrier to participation.

Goals

“Based on the goals we discussed for the examples of storytelling programs, are there any goals you think SVHC should adopt?”

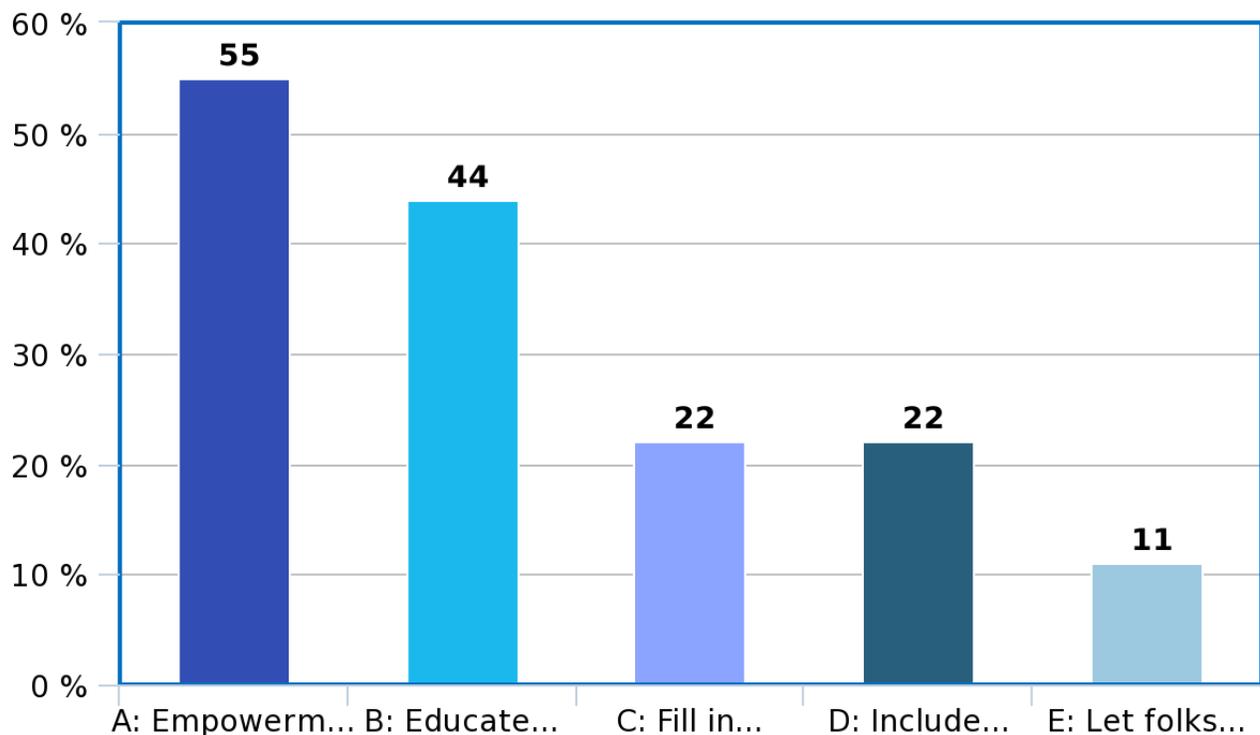
A: Empowerment/reclaiming narratives

B: Educate elected officials

C: Fill in the gaps in programming

D: Include rural areas of Cortland County

E: Let folks control what is shared and who it is shared with



Advocacy

I asked the respondents if they would be interested in having their stories be used to educate elected officials and 100% of them said yes. Note that the question did not imply that respondents had to speak directly with elected officials, rather their stories would be used indirectly for education or advocacy.

Formats

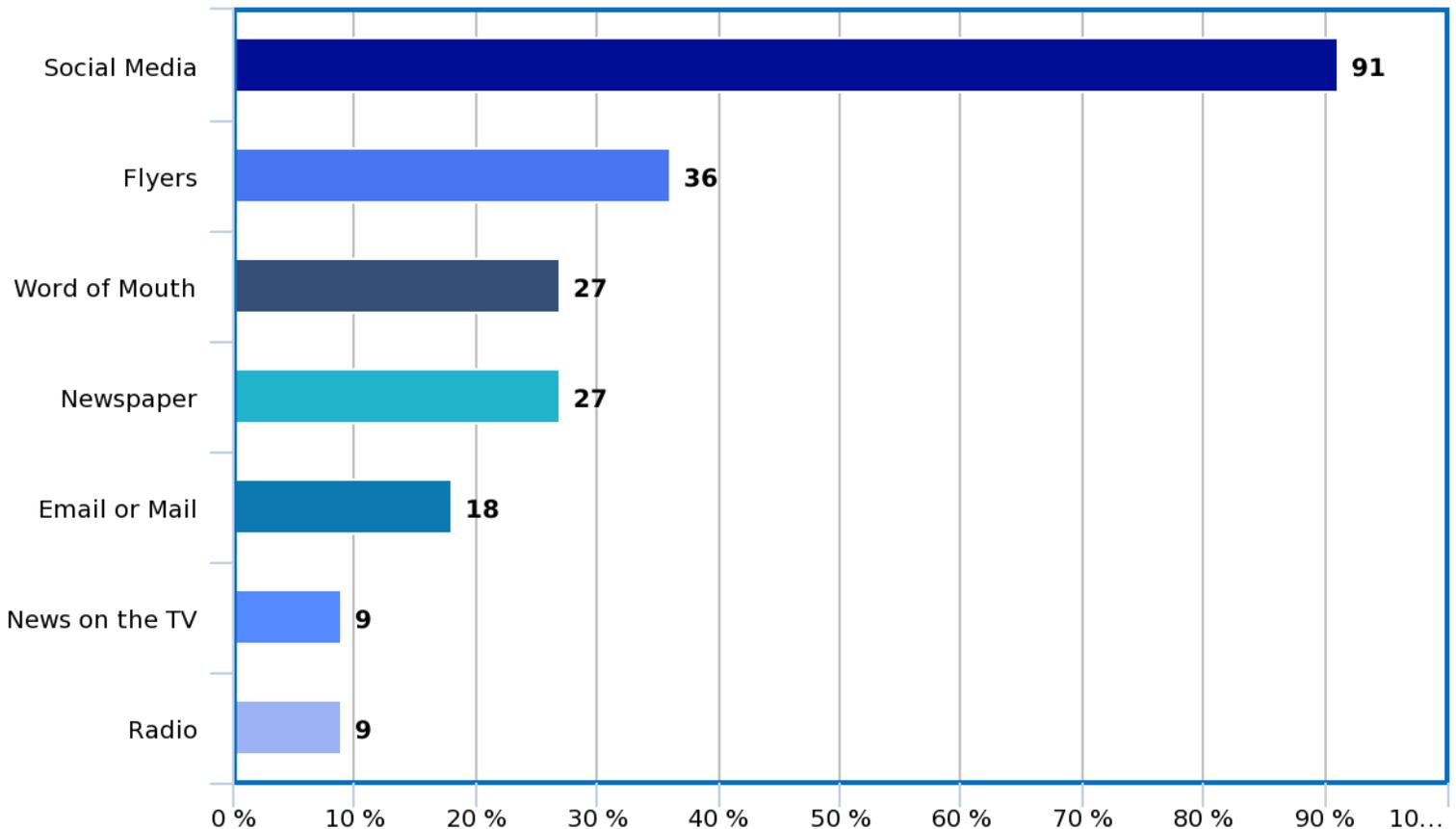
To understand what mediums of storytelling people preferred, participants indicated the formats they would consider if they were to share a story. Written content was preferred by 90% of participants, with 22% of those indicating that they would also be interested in speaking or creating an audio recording.

Anonymity

Participants were asked how much personal or identifying information they would be comfortable disclosing if they were to share a story. No participants indicated that they would want to share a photo or video of themselves. 20% of respondents were not interested in sharing a story at all and 40% would not want to include their name, but may be okay with their city or voice being disclosed. Of the 40% of participants that were comfortable sharing their names, half of those wanted only their first name to be revealed.

Outreach

“Where do you usually get information from?”



Managing Sign-Ups

To gain insight on the ease and accessibility of signing up for a program, I asked for their thoughts on an online form. 90% of folks said they thought an online form was a good way to manage enrollment for the storytelling program. One person mentioned that people with learning disabilities may have trouble accessing an online form.

Incentives

All of the participants stated that grocery or gas gift cards would make people more likely to sign up for the storytelling program. Another incentive that was mentioned was the potential to impact public policy by sharing a story.

Recommendations for Seven Valleys Health Coalition

After analyzing the data from 12 conversations with Cortland County residents who have lived or living experience of food insecurity, I have five recommendations for Seven Valleys Health Coalition as they continue the process of creating a storytelling program.

1. Continue Learning from Community Members

In the 12 discussions I had, I was able to learn a lot about the attitudes and perceptions of storytelling programs. Although that information was quite valuable, the perceptions of 12 individuals might not adequately capture the opinions of the nearly 50,000 residents in the county. In order to make an informed decision on the goals and format for the storytelling program, I recommend that SVHC continues having one-on-one conversations with community members who have lived experience of food insecurity. This will also give SVHC an opportunity to continue building trust with community members and deploy a targeted outreach initiative in the rural towns and villages in Cortland County.

2. Consider Sustainability

As the storytelling program is planned out and implemented, there are certain logistical elements that SVHC should actively keep in mind. The first being staff time. It takes a significant amount of time to engage community members and it is important for the person(s) that will be continuing the project to have the capacity to take it on. To ensure the continuity and sustainability of the program, it is necessary to have adequate funding for staff time, supports for the participants, and technological and space needs met to carry out the program.

3. Create Guiding Principles

Given that the storytelling program may be managed by multiple staff or community members in the future, it is important to create a set of guiding principles. The document should outline SVHC's commitments to carrying out a storytelling program in an inclusive manner and best practices for doing so. The guiding principles should be a living document that can be amended as the storytelling program continues.

4. Expand Organization-wide Trainings

All SVHC staff members and interns are required to complete HIPAA and sexual harassment trainings. Optional learning activities were centered around rural health. I recommend adding organization-wide training on racial equity and trauma-informed care. Many of SVHC's programs work directly with community members and a trauma-informed approach can help guide that work. Given that 95% of Cortland County's population is white, it is imperative that a racial equity lens is applied to SVHC's work in addressing social determinants of health since racial inequity is a root cause of food insecurity and other social issues. Racial equity and trauma-informed care training for staff, interns, and volunteers will not only assist SVHC in carrying out a successful storytelling program, but all of their programs and services will benefit.

5. Continue Meaningful Engagement

In addition to continuing to include community members with lived or living experience of food insecurity in the development of the program's goals, SVHC should consider building the capacity to meaningfully engage folks in the design, execution, and evaluation of the storytelling program. Inclusion is necessary to elevate the voices of people with lived experience of food insecurity. SVHC can also consider recruiting storytelling participants to take on a paid role and help carry out the storytelling program.

Appendices

Appendix A: Email Template

Hello _____,

My name is Elaine Zhang and I am a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow currently working with Seven Valleys Health Coalition. We are creating a new program that shares stories of people experiencing food insecurity in Cortland County. It is important to us to develop the program in an inclusive manner and listen to people with lived or living experience of hunger in the planning process.

Therefore, we would greatly appreciate if you would share the attached flyers with your clients through social media and/or post them at your food distributions. The attached materials invite folks to participate in a brief, 20-40 minute phone conversation in December 2021 - January 2022. Participants are offered a \$20 grocery gift card in appreciation of their time and effort.

Inside the attached ZIP file, you will find:

- 8.5 x 11 in. flyer: Can either be shared online or printed out
- 8.5 x 11 in. flyer with pull-tabs: Meant to be printed out and posted in a visible location
- 11 x 17 in. flyer: Poster-sized flyer with pull-tabs
- Square flyer: Can easily be posted to Facebook and Instagram
- Text file: Short introductory text that can accompany a social media post or newsletter entry

These materials can also be accessed through this Google Drive [link](#). If you would like to share the sign-up form directly with your clients, the link can be found [here](#). If you are unable to print, please let me know and we can mail some flyers out to you.

Feel free to print and distribute the flyers as you see fit. Please let me know if you have any questions about our storytelling program. We appreciate your support!

Best,

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script

Introduction

Hi, [participant name]. Thanks for taking the time to chat with me today. My name is Elaine Zhang and I work with Seven Valleys Health Coalition. I will be giving you an overview of SVHC and then we will talk about a new program we are working on.

The goal of this conversation is to:

- Better understand what value you can see in a storytelling program in Cortland County
- Get feedback on a few storytelling models that other organizations have found success with
- Help SVHC develop the goals and format of a storytelling program

You can skip questions or end this conversation at any time for any reason. This is all voluntary so we don't want to make you feel uncomfortable. I want to check to see if you're okay with me recording this call. Is that alright with you, [participant name]?

On the flyers and emails that were sent out to advertise this opportunity for a phone call, we mentioned that SVHC can provide a \$20 grocery gift card for your participation in this phone call. The gift card will be for [store name] and we will discuss how we can get the card over to you towards the end of the phone call.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Let's go ahead and get started with a few warm-up questions:

- How long have you lived in this area?
- What is your favorite food?
- How did you find out about this opportunity?

Introduction to SVHC and definitions of food insecurity and storytelling

I'm going to give you a brief introduction to Seven Valleys Health Coalition and Seven Valleys Food Rescue. Since 1994, SVHC has been serving Cortland County with the mission of advancing the health and wellbeing of the Cortland Community.

One of SVHC's programs, Seven Valleys Food Rescue (SVFR), picks up excess healthy food from local food donors across Cortland County and delivers it to local

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script (Cont.)

organizations and community programs that feed food-insecure community members. We hope to create a program that shares the stories of people in Cortland County and we need your input.

If you are not familiar with the definition of food insecurity, it can look like a lot of different things. Maybe it is not knowing where your next meal will come from, or not having consistent access to enough food. Visiting a food pantry or qualifying for SNAP or WIC can also be indicators of food insecurity.

The program we are creating is a storytelling program. In our case, storytelling involves a member of the Cortland community volunteering to share a story about their personal experience with food insecurity. There could be many different goals for storytelling programs and that is why I want to talk to you about a few different programs that other organizations have done.

Do you have any questions about what food insecurity or storytelling means before I go on to give you examples of some storytelling programs?

Discussion of the four storytelling models

I have four examples I'd like to talk to you about today. I'll go over where each program is located or run, how the program works, and also the specific goals of that program. I have a few questions for you after each specific program. We will also discuss SVHC in particular after these 4 programs.

The first one that we're going to be talking about today is run by [organization name]. Their version of a storytelling program is called a community forum.

Storytelling Program Models

- Example 1: [organization name]'s Community Forums
 - Logistics
 - People with lived experience of food insecurity meet in an open space and volunteer to share their story at the front of the stage
 - There may be elected officials or people who work at local community organizations there who will listen, but not speak
 - Goals
 - Allow people with lived experience to reclaim their narrative and find power in sharing their story
 - Educate others about what experiencing food insecurity can look like

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script (Cont.)

- If a program like this was happening in Cortland, what might make it hard for people to attend or what are some reasons you think people would have for not attending? (no childcare, odd hours, no transportation)
- Do you think a program like this would be beneficial to have in Cortland County?
- Do you think this type of program should have elected officials or other people who have not experienced hunger before in the room?
- Are there any parts of this program that you like or dislike?
- Example 2: [organization name]'s Storybank Initiative
 - Logistics
 - Stories collected through audio, photo, video, and written content
 - Stories are shared through social media
 - Goals
 - Empower clients to tell their stories and share their voice
 - Put client voice at the center of what we do
 - Fill in the gaps in programming
 - They will take feedback from these stories, and then use it to improve their own programs at [organization name]
 - Assist with educational, fundraising, social media, community organization, and advocacy efforts
 - Humanize the narrative around food insecurity and hunger in [service area]
 - This program collects stories through audio, photos, writing and videos. If you were to share a story, what kind of formats might you be interested in?
 - The people who are sharing their stories have a lot of control over how much public information they'd like to share.
 - What do you think you would feel comfortable with if you were to share a story?
 - Are there any parts of this storytelling program that you really like or dislike?
- Example 3: [organization name]'s Speakers Bureau
 - Logistics
 - Client leadership program that trains community members in public speaking, media literacy, and how to share their stories in a powerful way over the course of 10 weeks

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script (Cont.)

- Graduates of the program can be requested for a speaking event (paid or unpaid)
 - Graduates of the Speakers Bureau have the opportunity to go to [location] and other places where there are elected officials or people in power and speak with those people.
 - Goals
 - Make the issue more personal by connecting people who are struggling to get by and have been subject to a broken system that keeps them in poverty
 - Educate elected officials and the general public on the root causes of hunger
 - If you were to share a story, would you be interested in having the story be used to educate elected officials?
 - Do you think the training that happens once a week for 10 weeks is too big of a commitment for most people?
 - Are there any parts of this storytelling program that you really like or dislike?
- Example 4: [organization name]'s Online Form
 - Logistics
 - Online form for people to share their stories or sign up to have someone reach out and collect their story
 - Goals
 - Inform advocacy efforts
 - Build a persuasive case for fair public policies
 - Educating the public on issues of hunger and how it can happen to anyone.
 - Does an online form seem like a good way to have people sign up for the storytelling program?
 - Do you think people prefer submitting their own story or talking to someone and having them help collect their story?
 - What types of incentives would make people more likely to sign up and share their story?

Feedback on SVHC Storytelling Program Goals

SVHC has one main storytelling goal and that is to elevate voices of people with lived or living experience of nutrition insecurity. We hope that the rest of the goals

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script (Cont.)

can be derived from conversations with people who live in Cortland County and have firsthand experience with food insecurity.

Vision

- Now that you have an idea of what a few storytelling programs look like and what their goals are
 - Is there an element of a storytelling program you think is absolutely necessary?
 - Of the 4 programs I mentioned, do you have a favorite?
 - Community forum, storybank initiative, speaker's bureau, online form
- What do you think a storytelling program in Cortland County could look like?
- What impact do you think this program could have in Cortland County?
 - What changes would you like to see in Cortland maybe a couple of months or a couple of years down the line as a result of this storytelling program?

Goals

- Based on the goals we discussed for the examples of storytelling programs, are there any goals you think SVHC should adopt?
 - Are any of the goals things you think we should not adopt?
 - Can you think of any other goals that haven't been mentioned yet?

Outreach

- What are the best ways to outreach to people when we begin the storytelling program?
 - Have you seen flyers for this opportunity posted anywhere else?
 - Where do you usually get information from? (For example, the newspaper, social media, fliers?)

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions and chat with me. The information you gave me will be used to inform the development of the storytelling program. Are you interested in sharing your story in the future when we launch the program? I am hoping to talk to more people about this storytelling program. Do you know anyone who might be interested in having a phone call with me that is similar to this call?

For the \$20 grocery gift card to [store name], you can pick it up from our office or we could mail it to you. What works best for you?

Appendix C: Storytelling Conversation Script (Cont.)

That's just about all I have for you in terms of this storytelling goal conversation. I really, really do appreciate your time. And your feedback is really important for the development this program. So before we wrap it up, I just wanted to ask you if there are any questions or concerns you may have for me.

Once again, thank you so much for your time, and I hope you have a great rest of your day.

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