

## **Healthy Habits Program**

**Request:** We are respectfully requesting \$8,700 in funding to purchase produce for our Healthy Habits Program. Healthy Habits will provide healthy produce and more to aging adults through spring and fall as an extension/wraparound of our current Veggiepalooza and Nutritional Education (VNE) program, which is offered only during July, August and September during the NJ growing season when we have donated produce available, giving underserved low-income older adults the opportunity to improve their diet and health at a time when it is needed most.

**Summary of the Problem:** Due to recent SNAP benefit cuts combined with the high price of groceries and produce overall, more low-income seniors than ever are not able to afford to purchase healthy produce at the grocery store. Food Pantry participants are at an all-time high, and as produce is not readily available at local pantries in spring and fall, older adults who supplement their diet with food pantry offerings are eating more processed, packaged and canned food high in sodium, empty calories, sugar and fat.

Older adults need a reliable source of healthy alternatives to include along with food pantry shopping to be healthy.

**Our proposed Solution:** The Health Habits program will offer extra weeks of a free produce distribution before and after our VNE free weekly produce distribution is offered in July, August and September (the NJ growing season when we can procure free produce donations).

Healthy Habits will combine a free weekly produce distribution with a wellness program in our center's back yard. The Healthy Habits program will host a nutritionist with samples and recipes (in both English and Spanish) using the produce on offer in various ways, ensuring that they will enjoy adding the healthy produce into their diet. In addition, we will offer Every-Body Chair Yoga and stretching mini sessions, plus a table of local resources and programs available for older adults. Lastly, because Harvest Family Success (HFSC) has access to several financial assistance programs from the state and county for qualified individuals (such as help paying for heating oil, electricity, and car repair), HFSC will also have a table at Healthy Habits. There, participants can work with one of our Family Partners if they would like, gain access to applying for these programs as well, and learn about other free senior programs we offer such as senior support groups, Knitting and Crochet Club, and a Chair Yoga class.

By offering additional services as well as space to socialize, Healthy Habits will help break isolation and create a network of friends and supports to improve the lives of underserved older adults.

**Plan to accomplish:** Healthy Habits will begin a weekly produce, wellness and nutritional information distribution May 17 through July 1<sup>st</sup>, then again October 1<sup>st</sup> through Thanksgiving, totaling 15 weeks, occurring both before and after the VNE program is available with donated produce. Our VNE program is for all low-income families and individuals regardless of age.

We will start by contacting those seniors who have participated in VNE in 2022, reaching out to the local senior housing apartment complexes, churches and food pantries to be sure those in need are aware of the produce distribution and additional services being offered. We plan to invite those 60 and over.

We are the only local group offering a produce distribution in spring and fall. The pantry is doing a great job adding in produce when they can, but if any produce is on offer, it is in short supply and mostly 2<sup>nd</sup> grade goods.

Older adults are a proud lot. To avoid the feeling that they are “standing in line for food” the addition of the information booths, chair yoga/stretching plus simply having access to lawn chairs where participants can relax and chat with others is an important addition to the produce distribution. They may come for the food alone, but will get so much more than a bag of healthy produce by attending.

**Who will be served:** Healthy Habits will serve our underserved, older, low-income adults in Hunterdon County and beyond. We anticipate 60-70 older adults each week will attend (based on the number of seniors that participate in July-August-September VNE program) but because the need right now is so great, participant numbers may be higher. Though our average families are close to 75% Latinx, most of the seniors we serve are white/Caucasian, and are only about 15-20% Latinx. For our programs Spanish speakers are always staffed and written nutritional guides and recipes are always offered in English and Spanish.

During the summer months HFSC offers VNE, and uses donated produce from local farms such as Peterson’s, Pennypack, Solly Brothers, Cabbage Throw, Square Stone, Bonacorsi’s Family Farm, as well as food rescue groups like Rolling Harvest and Grow-A-Row.

### **How Harvest Family Success Center is addressing DEI**

Besides currently having a 6-person Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Prevention Resources/HFSC has committed to making real and lasting changes to improve the cultural and linguistic competency of staff and associated parties, acknowledging that these standards are evolving and in need of consistent assessment and will be updated as often as necessary to stay reflective of current language and actions.

The agency will have a minimum of one annual Cultural Competency training and annual evaluation for the overall practices, policies, and procedures in accordance with the most current national CLAS standards. This will be led and followed up on by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee (DIC) in partnership with agency leadership.

The entire policy is available upon request, but will abide by the SMART guidelines for goal making (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result/impact, Timely).

### **How the project aligns with FFA values**

**1. SERVICE TO DIVERSE POPULATIONS** Every older adult is welcome to attend Healthy Habits. We don't screen for economic need, rather we feel that if they are attending one of our programs, they want or need to be there. We feel strongly that by including everyone in the community, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, etc, we are truly embracing the entire community and all its members. In addition our staff is widely diverse, so everyone feels at home when visiting HFSC, and everyone knows they belong.

**2. POTENTIAL TO CREATE CHANGE** Older adults on fixed incomes were so negatively affected by the pandemic and the isolation and inflation that occurred since 2020, many may never bounce back to their pre-pandemic way of life. Helping that population become healthier and happier is paramount. Although it seems as if older adults have been dealt a heavy blow these past 3 years, we know they are also a resilient group. With the addition of programs like Healthy Habits, we can turn the tide and help these folks get back on their feet.

**3. LEVERAGING OF RESOURCES** We know this program will be well received, and we also know that our community can be very supportive. Our goal with Healthy Habits would be to promote the successful program to churches and other local groups in the hopes that they will share our view of the need of a program such as this, and help us with funding in 2024. That's why it is so important for us to bring in many different groups to volunteer, so they can see the program working, meet the participants and feel the need to be more involved.

**4. COLLABORATION** The HFSC is well adept at running programs on shoe-string budgets, and rely heavily on our community members, other non-profits, businesses, houses of worship and community clubs and groups for support. Harvest is very small, with only 4 full time and 2 part time staff, in addition our budget is very limited and our state funding is all to be spent on children and families. We couldn't offer the services and programs we do without constantly collaborating with others.

For example, during the summer months HFSC offers VNE, and uses donated produce from local farms such as Peterson's, Pennypack, Solly Brothers, Cabbage Throw, Bonacorsi's, as well as food rescue groups like Rolling Harvest and Grow-A-Row. We need roughly 10 volunteers each week to help with the distribution, and at least 3 others to pick up and deliver produce. There are many moving parts of our programs, so collaboration is key to our success.

**5. ENGAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEES AND PARTICIPANTS** At HFSC we see the need for inclusivity and strive to incorporate people of all regions, all abilities, and all ages in our programming. Our years-long relationship with 2 local programs for young adults with special needs, and our commitment to engaging youth, youth groups and clubs is well-known. Every person has the ability to step up and lead, and we offer those opportunities, and celebrate their accomplishments.

**6. CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT OF FRIENDS FOUNDATION FOR THE AGING** The door is always open at the HFSC, yes, because we are a passionate group who believes in our work, but also because we hope those that visit "catch the fever" so to speak, and will join us in our mission to fill gaps of services offered to those underserved, be it a group of seniors, families, low-income community members, LGBTQIA members, those of the Latinx community and more.

**7. INTEGRATION OF SERVICES** Healthy Habits addresses many of the needs of low-income seniors, and indeed all seniors:

- \* physical- offering chair yoga/stretching class as well as healthy produce
- \* social- giving older adults a place to gather and break the cycle of isolation
- \* emotional- allowing seniors the space conducive to forming friendships and connect
- \* intellectual- Offering recipes in English and Spanish with nutritional information, plus as our center library is always open, in addition to our on-site Free Little Library, so participants can avail themselves of free books to take home with them
- \* spiritual and purpose- Seniors make great volunteers, in fact nearly 40 % of our volunteers are 55 and over. We encourage others to join us and feel the joy when helping others. By helping to create purposeful lives, we are helping people feel better about themselves, and give them a feeling of belonging.

**Collaboration & other partners for implementation or funding?**

The Healthy Habits program has pledges from Star Throwers (young adults with special needs), the QT's (a Flemington Queer/Trans social group) as well as 4 local churches, a Mission group, temple youth group, a women's support group and the Frenchtown Super Seniors to serve as volunteers.

HFSC will provide staff to run the program, pay for produce delivery from the store to the center, pay for the Chair Yoga instructor and Nutritionist, bags for the produce, the snacks and drinks, venue space/insurance, and printing of fliers and recipes.

Shop Rite has committed to a 20% discount on all produce purchases.

The Flemington Presbyterian Church has given \$500 plus the use of their social hall during inclement weather to run the program.

The Frenchtown Presbyterian Church has pledged \$1000 towards the program, as did the Clinton United Methodist Church.

**Outcomes:** We will count the amount of produce distributed each week, along with the numbers of participants. We will offer a pre and post survey to track what participants felt they gained throughout the project, what health benefits they experienced and if they learned of any additional resources.

**Organization history and competence for this project.** HFSC has been a leader in our community in providing caring assistance to all for over 14 years. Our goal is to be a safe space for families and older adults, offering programming to educate, empower and assist those in need to reach their full potential and thrive.

HFSC is proud to collaborate with the area's other non-profits, including the 70-member Hunterdon County Partnership for Health, One Voice (faith community coalition) Chamber of Commerce, local food pantries, our Domestic Violence center SAFE, Family Promise Homeless Shelter, Recovery and Family Support Center, Senior Services, Salvation Army, YMCA, United Way, Norwescap and more.

The HFSC never duplicates services, but strive instead to offer services filling gaps in need that are not being currently met, and enhance programs being offered. A large portion of our low-income community members are Latinx, many are undocumented, many cannot read and for most there is a language barrier. Our services are always offered in English and Spanish, and we are located within walking distance to 6 low income apartment complexes, but also offer travel vouchers ensuring everyone can attend our free programming.

Our long history offering programming to the seniors in need in our community makes us an ideal group to lead the charge for increased health to seniors by providing free healthy produce to those who cannot afford to purchase their own.

## **Health Habits Program Budget:**

### **Program Costs:**

- **Weekly Produce Purchase: \$9.66 (approx..) per person x 60 participants x 15 weeks = \$8700**
- Pick up and delivery: \$25 x 15 weeks = \$375
- Chair Yoga/Stretching instructor: \$100 x 15 weeks = \$1500
- One-time reusable tote purchase: \$5 x 60 participants = \$300
- Nutritionist: \$100 x 15 weeks = \$1500
- Insurance Rider: \$100 x 4 months = \$400
- Healthy snacks/water - \$15 x 15 weeks = \$225
- Staff/Manager = \$33 x 15 = \$500

## **Healthy Habits Total Cost: \$13,500**

## **Request: \$8,700 towards the purchase of produce**

Costs covered with other funding/donations- \$4,800

Donations from: Shop Rite, HFSC, Flemington Presbyterian Church, Frenchtown Presbyterian Church, Clinton United Methodist Church