

# FOOD EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT AURORA: LESSONS LEARNED IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING THROUGH THE LENS OF A FOOD INTERVENTION PROGRAM

SABRINA L. NESLADEK  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, DENVER, CO



## The FEED Aurora Program

Since 2016, Food Education and Environmental Development (FEED) Aurora has partnered with Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) and Cooking Matters Colorado (CMC) to provide a dual gardening and nutrition education program. Food and nutrition are among the top social determinants and health factors impacting population outcomes such as quality of life, morbidity, mortality and life expectancy for all age groups (1). By affecting change in healthy eating attitudes and behaviors, FEED aims to change the food environment and thus health of food insecure and at-risk families in the Aurora area. This poster highlights the challenges encountered during the 2021 program year and lessons learned through engagement with families to inform future food intervention programs.

### Background

Originally designed as a pediatric intervention program, FEED Aurora expanded its target population in 2021 as a result of several factors:

- Data showing that children's eating behaviors, lifestyle, eating-related attitudes, and body image are modeled after parental beliefs, actions, and provision of healthy foods (2,3)
- A large proportion of undocumented persons in Aurora who cannot access government food assistance programs, necessitating alternative food intervention programs
- The COVID-19 pandemic causing 43% of people of color in Colorado to struggle to access quality nutritious food (5).
- A new partnership with Dedicated to Auroras Wellness and Needs (DAWN), which serves some of the most at-risk families in Aurora

Ultimately, the literature, overall need within the community, and partnership with DAWN drove FEED to pursue a family-centered approach to programming.

### Program Design

- 6-week program running June through July
- Families attend a weekly event held at Fletcher Community Garden in Aurora and learn the basics of gardening
- After the gardening session, they receive food and a healthy recipe
- In the comfort of their own kitchens, families virtually join a live cooking and nutrition session based off CMC curricula
- All garden materials and food provided by FEED
- CMC provided a \$10 incentive for each session attended

### Program Challenges

- Late start to recruitment meant that there was less than 2 months to spread the word about FEED to the community
- Limited ability to interface with potential participants in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Numerous barriers participants faced: transportation, mobility/physical fitness, work, time constraints, lack of trust in the FEED program

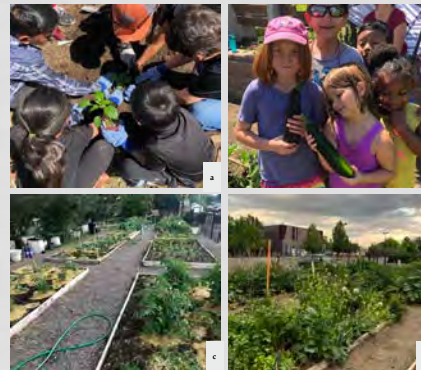


Figure 1: Children participating in FEED Aurora 2019 (a,b) highlight how engaged and excited children are when experiencing gardening. Fletcher Community Garden at the beginning (c) and midway through (d) the 2021 growing season. Fletcher is a DUG garden located 2 blocks east of DAWN.

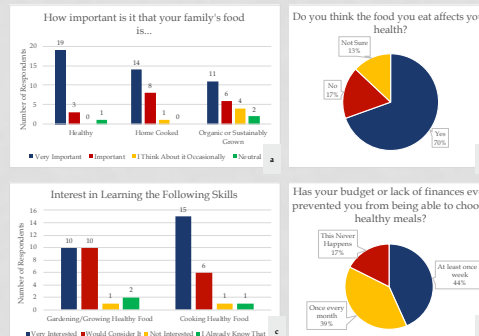


Figure 2: CLD Survey Data. (a) Importance of different aspects of a family's food environment. (b) Perceptions around the connection between food and health. (c) Interest in learning different skills pertaining to the FEED Aurora program. (d) Effect of finances on the ability to choose healthy foods.

### Survey Results

Given the difficulty in getting families to engage in programming, FEED surveyed the Community Leaders of DAWN (CLD), a group of patients dedicated to guiding change within the DAWN infrastructure. 23 CLD members responded to the brief online survey. The data shows that most DAWN patients want healthy, homecooked, and organic food (Figure 2a), which FEED provides. Of note, less than 50% of respondents showed strong interest in gardening (Figure 2c), indicating that this is a less desired skill. Interestingly, over a quarter of respondents did not think that food affects their health (Figure 2b). This signals an opportunity to educate more on this topic. Finally, 83% of our surveyed population said that lack of finances are a barrier to getting healthy food every week to every month (Figure 2d). This highlights the need in the community for programs that improve healthy food access, which FEED does.

### Lessons Learned

- Partnering with community members and eliciting their input is critical to understanding needs, areas of weakness, and effective ways to change
- Recruitment should start months in advance of the start date and involve many different people at different levels of the DAWN organization
- Barriers to participant involvement must be addressed early and in full
- Participants need the freedom to opt in/out of different aspects of the program dependent on their interests and availability
- Participant trust is difficult to foster in the current virtual world, discussions in-person are the best way to circumvent this

### References

1. Hutchinson J, Watt JF, Strachan EK, Cade JE. (2016). Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Ministry of Food cooking programme on self-reported food consumption and confidence with cooking. *Public Health Nutrition*, 19, 3417- 3427.
2. Scaglioni S, De Cosmi V, Ciappalino V, Parazzini F, Brambilla P, Agostoni C. Factors Influencing Children's Eating Behaviours. *Nutrients*. 2018;10(6):706. Published 2018 May 31. doi:10.3390/nut10060706
3. Yee AZ, Lwin MO, Ho SS. The influence of parental practices on child promotive and preventive food consumption behaviors: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2017;14(1):47. Published 2017 Apr 11. doi:10.1186/s12966-017-05013-4.
4. Hunger Free Colorado. A Survey of Hunger in Colorado: Economic Insecurity, Hunger and the Pandemic. <https://hungerfreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Survey-of-Hunger-in-Colorado-April-2021-English.pdf>. Accessed October 5, 2021.

### Acknowledgements

Dr. Joseph Johnson: Program Mentor  
Folake, Jordan, Sheila, Danny, Mundo & Maggie : FEED Volunteers  
DAWN clinic, DUG, CMC: Community Partners  
The Slay Family Community Scholars Grant: 2021 Funding Source

1455 DAWN Patients Seen in 2021

Only 19 Families Contacted for the FEED Aurora Program

5 Families Signed up for the Summer Sessions

Only 1 Family Ultimately Able to Attend