

THE IMPACT OF NUTRITION CLASSES AT URBAN PEAK ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND DIETARY PATTERNS OF UNHOUSED YOUTH

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Background: Unhoused youth are a highly underserved community facing nutritional vulnerability due to food insecurity, lack of nutritional knowledge, and inadequate intake. Studies have previously investigated the nutritional deficiencies and the associated health implications of malnourishment impacting unhoused youth. However, few teams have explored the impact of nutritional education on the dietary patterns of unhoused youth.

Objective: This project aimed to implement nutrition classes at Urban Peak, an unhoused youth shelter in Denver for clients ranging in age from 15 – 20, to evaluate the impact of education on the dietary patterns and nutritional status of this population.

Methods: Using ideas generated by the youth clients and Urban Peak staff, the project rotated through eight weekly lesson plans focused on nutritional education. Before each lesson, the youth completed a pre-survey to assess their current knowledge and dietary behaviors concerning the topic. After each lesson, they completed a post-survey to evaluate for understanding and impact. Approximately one month later, the youth completed an additional post-survey to assess for information retention and dietary changes. The surveys were utilized to determine if nutrition classes improve the nutritional knowledge and dietary patterns of unhoused youth.

Conclusions: Following the implementation of the curriculum at Urban Peak, it was evident that the youth have a strong foundational knowledge of nutrition and retained information from the lessons in the short-term indicating the curriculum's beneficial impact. However, given the complexity of working with unhoused populations, the long-

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term efficacy of the curriculum on the dietary patterns and nutritional status of the youth could not be evaluated and remains an important area for future investigation. Based on feedback provided by the youth, the design of the curriculum was modified to emphasize small-group discussion and mentorship to better support the relationship-building between the medical student participants and the youth clients. With Urban Peak established as a sustainable service-learning site through the University of Colorado School of Medicine, there are many future directions for the project to take to further support the shifting needs of the youth, investigate the long-term impact of nutritional education, and better address the nutritional disparities this population faces.

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