

COOKING GROUP — FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

January, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The Nine Circles Cooking Group is a hands-on Cooking Group for individuals living with HIV. The Cooking Group was created in consultation with Nine Circles staff and clients of the Manitoba HIV Program, and is facilitated by the Nine Circles Occupational Therapist and the Manitoba HIV Program Dietitian; Cooking Group is offered on a bi-weekly basis at a Winnipeg West End community kitchen.

Participants of the Nine Circles Cooking Group collaborate to prepare a nutritious meal, with emphasis on developing food preparation skills and increasing nutrition and food safety knowledge. Participants also have the opportunity to socialize and share a meal with other individuals living with HIV. The ability to safely cook a low-cost, healthy meal is a life skill which can improve an individual's nutritional intake, contribute to food security, and support independence. Additionally, cooking is a therapeutic activity that provides cognitive and physical benefits. These cognitive benefits are achieved through incorporating the use of problem solving, sequencing, time management, and concentration skills, while the physical benefits derived from cooking include: fine motor skills development; improved range of motion; and increased muscle strength and balance.

The Cooking Group is a popular program with clients from Nine Circles Community Health Centre. Since the program began in November of 2011, 37 Cooking Group sessions have been held with 241 attendees/contacts, 41 of these being distinct individuals (i.e. several participants attended on multiple occasions).

~ "I used to be scared of cooking, so I never cooked for myself. But now that I have been taking these classes, I'm cooking more and it doesn't bother me anymore" ~

DATA COLLECTION

Client feedback on their experiences at Cooking Group was collected in several ways:

- A 'wrap-up' at the close of each Cooking Group. The facilitators hold a short feedback session and ask a series of evaluative questions in order to gauge the functioning and efficacy of the group.
- Focus groups. One group of clients attended the first day, and a different group on the second day (to keep the group size manageable). The Nine Circles Research & Evaluation Coordinator facilitated the groups while an assistant took additional notes. As a thank you for participating, the attendees were offered juice and soda drinks during the focus group, and at the close of the group the participants transferred to a different room for a meal prepared by the Cooking Group facilitators.
- The facilitators held two Cooking Group 'wind-up' sessions (one with one group of clients, and a second with a different group of clients to keep the group size manageable). The purpose of these sessions were to thank clients for participating, an introduction of the upcoming new group format, and to offer feedback on their experiences at Cooking Group. Attendees received a grocery store gift card, a cook book, and a meal prepared by the facilitators for participating. Evaluative questions were posted around the room, and clients affixed their answers/feedback with a 'sticky note', also a short survey was administered to the attendees during the sessions.

~ "We give feedback at every class and our opinions matter" ~

SUMMARY

Participants identified that good and simple recipes have been key to the success of the group. Also, the facilitators work to make the group fun, enjoyable, and inclusive; they always speak with each client, and treat everyone respectfully.

The participants identified Cooking Group as an enjoyable and meaningful experience. Cooking Group has offered many practical applications which clients have incorporated into daily life, but has also provided the opportunity for social connection and community-building. Cooking Group has been a positive experience their lives in several ways including:

- **Better understanding of nutrition and healthier food choices**
- **Maximizing food budget and use of food bank items**
- **Safe food handling and preparation skills**
- **Improved self-confidence and new skills and abilities**
- **Improved food security (the meal, plus take-home food)**
- **Improved nutritional intake**
- **Helped to address physical and emotional barriers to preparing food**
- **Provides knowledge of, and access to, community resources and events**
- **Is a positive environment for social connection and interaction**
- **Is a venue to discuss concerns, accomplishments, and personal and community issues**

The participants also identified some areas where the facilitators could make some adjustments to enhance the functioning of the group, such as: new recipes the clients would like to try at group, implementing reminders about upcoming Cooking Groups, teaching new skills such as canning, and continuing to find ways to incorporate common food bank items in recipes.

Going forward, Cooking Group will continue as a closed-group format with clients registering for a series of 8 sessions (2 sessions per month, for 4 months); participants will graduate at the end of the series and receive completion prizes and certificates.

RESULTS

The following summary of the participant feedback, organized into themes, highlights:

- How Cooking Group has helped participants
- What they've learned
- The best thing(s) about the group
- How they're using what they learned in their everyday life
- Examples of topics of additional discussion that took place at group
- Examples of resources and services participants learned about while at group
- Suggestions for improving the group, and things they'd like to try

THEMES

SELF-EFFICACY

- Finishing a project (the meal) and being proud of what you've done
- More self-confidence
- Alleviating fear and anxiety around cooking and making mistakes

SOCIAL

- Teamwork and division of duties
- Interpersonal skills (sharing, conversation skills)
- Managing/coping with conflict
- Practiced English language skills
- Spending time with others
- Meeting new people
- Entertaining friends at home and cooking for them

HEALTH PROMOTION

- Healthier food choices (when cooking and also in choosing prepped foods)
- Sensible portion sizes
- Using substitutions in recipes (lower fat, lower sugar, adding more fruits/vegetables)
- Cooking from scratch

~ "This is the first time I've got up the nerve to go to a group in a long time" ~

~ "Cooking isn't that hard!" ~

~ "I was afraid of cooking, and thought it was complicated. I'm not afraid to try anymore" ~

~ "We get to socialize together, it's like family gathering" ~

~ "It's a great exercise in cooperation and community building" ~

~ "Adding strawberries to a salad makes a really good salad" ~

THEMES

HEALTH LITERACY

- Reading and understanding nutrition labels (calories, nutritional value, 'hidden' sugars)
- Antioxidants and free radicals
- 'Good' fats versus 'bad' fats
- Benefits of, and sources of fiber
- Sources of protein (other than meat)
- Which foods help bone health
- Amount of cholesterol in foods
- Which foods help ease digestive upset
- Benefits of whole grain foods
- Learning about other health conditions (i.e. diabetes)

SAFETY

- Safe food handling
- Safe/proper cutting and chopping
- Food storage and expiry dates
- Managing poor balance when cooking

PRACTICAL FORMAT

- The format is hands-on; clients get to actually do the preparation and cooking

~ "Because of this group I now make sure I eat brown or whole wheat bread, brown rice and whole wheat pasta. It's healthier and keeps me full longer" ~

~ "I thought stuff that was frozen lasted forever, but it doesn't" ~

~ "I learn from the visual. And get great tips on how to fix certain issues I have been having while cooking" ~

THEMES

EVERYDAY LIVING

- Savvy shopping (avoiding impulse buys, comparing price and size for better value)
- Shopping/cooking within a budget
- Following a recipe
- Cooking for a large group of people, or for just 1 – 2 people
- Utilizing a wider array of utensils/supplies (parchment paper, hand blender, corn starch)

~ “I’m definitely going to make this recipe again because it’s cheap and easy to make” ~

~ “Because of this group, I’ve started cooking at home!” ~

FOOD SECURITY

- Utilizing/maximizing food bank foods in recipes, namely items that seem difficult to cook or incorporate into a recipe such as lentils or zucchini
- Having a full meal, plus food to take home (sometimes there is enough to last for several days)
- Periodically there is a draw for a gift card/certificate from a local grocery store
- Spending less of food budget on fast food

HIV

- Receiving advice and support from other HIV positive people, such as issues around the side-effects of HIV medication
- It’s a relaxing environment because clients don’t have to worry about stigma when coming to group

~ “PHAs isolate themselves. This makes them leave the house” ~*

**People/person(s) Living With HIV/AIDS.*

ADDITIONAL TOPICS DISCUSSED

- Managing conflicts with other Nine Circles clients
- Dealing with family conflicts
- Homophobia
- Coping with change
- Effectively managing fatigue
- Sleep hygiene
- How to incorporate exercise into daily routine
- Goal setting

AVAILABLE RESOURCES & SERVICES DISCUSSED

- Programming, events, and services at Nine Circles
- Conflict and anger workshops
- Canada's Food Guide
- Free/low cost clothing in Winnipeg
- "Eat Free Every Day in Winnipeg" handout
- Accessing subsidized gym memberships
- Employment resources
- Accessing the HIV Program Dietitian the Nine Circles Occupational Therapist one-on-one

PARTICIPANT SUGGESTIONS

NEW SKILLS

- Making own spices and spice mixes (as they can be expensive)
- Windowsill gardening (i.e. growing herbs to cook with)
- Canning and making preserves (pickles, jams)
- How to add meats to vegetarian dishes
- More cost-effective ways to get meat
- Learning to cook with a wok

RECIPE REQUESTS

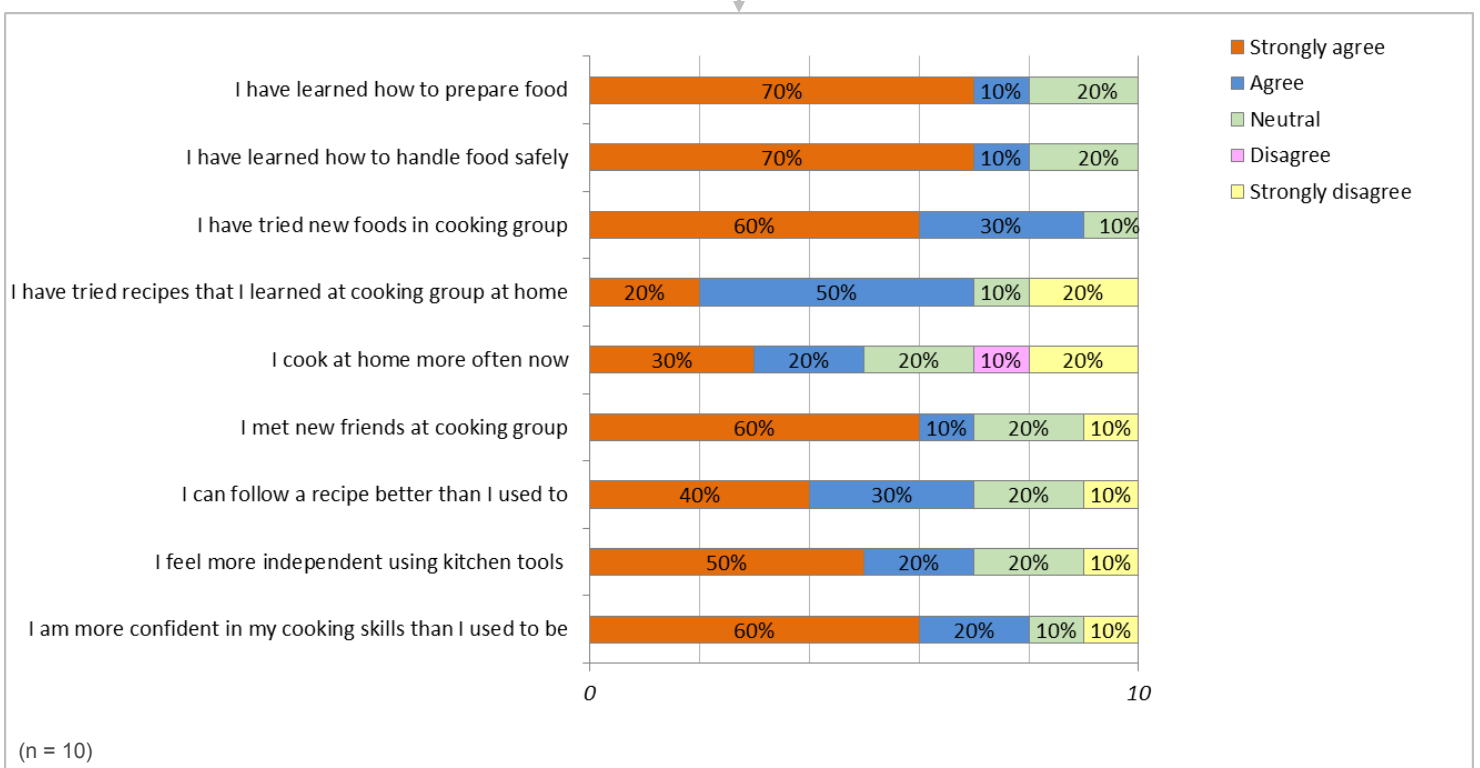
- World cuisine
- Breakfast foods
- Salads
- Pizza (including making crust from scratch)
- Whole wheat bannock

OTHER THINGS FACILITATORS CAN DO

- Play music during prep and cooking of the meal
- Encourage/remind clients to call and cancel if they cannot attend
- Clarify exactly which staff to inform when you cannot attend
- Reminders about upcoming Cooking Groups
- Have a barbeque one class
- Make more food so clients have more to take home and freeze

SURVEY RESULTS

- ⇒ 80% of respondents indicated that they have learned how to **prepare food**
- ⇒ 80% learned how to **handle food safely**
- ⇒ 90% tried **new foods** in Cooking Group
- ⇒ 70% **have tried recipes** they learned at Cooking Group **at home**
- ⇒ 50% **cook at home more often** now
- ⇒ 70% **met new friends** at Cooking Group
- ⇒ 70% can **follow a recipe** better than they used to
- ⇒ 70% feel **more independent using kitchen tools** (stove, blender, knives)
- ⇒ 80% feel **more confident in their cooking skills**



SAMPLE COOKING GROUP RECIPES & HANDOUT

Nine Circles Community Health Centre: Cooking Class Recipes

Veggie Chilli

Makes a large pot

Ingredients:

3	Onions, chopped
4 x 680mL can	Tomato sauce
4	Green peppers, chopped
2	Zucchini, chopped
5	Large carrots, chopped
2 x 540mL can	Kidney beans, drained and rinsed
2 x 540mL can	Chick peas, drained and rinsed
1 can	Tomato paste
5 Tbsp	Chilli powder
Dash	Basil
Dash	Thyme

Directions:

Combine all of the ingredients in a large pot and simmer for as long as needed on low-medium heat (at least an hour). Stir occasionally. Leftovers are ok for 3-4 days in the fridge or can be frozen for up to 3 months. Try using leftovers to make Taco Salad – recipe below.

Taco Salad

Directions:

Make a tossed salad with veggies you like (make it big enough to cover a dinner plate for each person eating the meal). Consider using baby spinach or dark green lettuce instead of iceberg lettuce. Other veggies that can be included are broccoli, cauliflower, tomato, peppers, carrot, celery, green onions etc. The salad will be a crunchy contrast to the soft veggies in the chilli.

Scoop tossed salad to cover each individual's plate for the base.

Crumble up corn chips or tortilla chips and sprinkle on the salad.

Scoop chilli on top of the crumbled chips.

Sprinkle grated cheese over the chilli.

Enjoy a different way to use your leftover chilli.

Contact Us:

If you have questions about Cooking Group or other Nine Circles programming and services, please call:

204-940-6000 or visit www.ninecircles.ca

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