

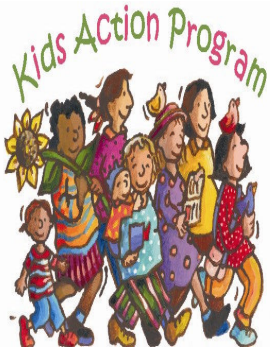
Food Box Program: Current and Potential Contributions to the Social Economy

Project 3.1

Patty Williams, Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), Sub Node 3(SN3) Food Security and CED Coordinator; **Debbie Reimer**, Kids Action Program (KAP), SN3 Steering Committee Member; **Lesley Frank**, KAP Community Staff Person ('07-Mar. 08); **Jessica Penner**, Research Assistant, SN3 (Jan 07-Dec. 08)

September 2008

Funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada



Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network
Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité



Introduction

- The Food Box Program has been funded through Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) as part of Kids Action Program's (KAP) Great Beginnings Program since 1995
 - Assists pre- and post-natal women with infants up to 6mths of age in Kings and Hants Co. facing barriers such as low income
 - 50 participants receive a food box valued at \$45-65 for cost of \$15
 - Aims to supplement food budget, model healthy local food choices, distribute information and support local producers and suppliers
- In 2006 KAP identified the need to evaluate the current Food Box Program, and explore the potential the program to better serve the community



Background and Rationale

- **Food box programs have emerged across Canada as an alternative food network**
- **Four models identified through a review of the literature:**
 - 1) **Good Food Box** – non-profit food distribution group, relies on purchase of local produce as much as possible and customers pay the price of food and delivery
 - 2) **Organic Veggie Food Box** – delivered, sometimes supplied by local organic produce, generally a for-profit business
 - 3) **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** – provided entirely from one farm in exchange for a lump sum payment at the beginning of the season
 - 4) **Emergency Relief Food Box** – sometimes supplied locally or from traditional sources, free or at a small cost or funded and/or relies on donations



Background and Rationale

- Outcomes of participation in Good Food Box Program (*Brownless and Cammer, 2004*)
 - Increased fruit and vegetable consumption
 - Improved links to the community
 - People supporting each other and their community
- **Published research is limited.**
Gaps include:
 - The viability of these programs operating in a rural areas as they are often available only in urban settings
 - Concrete evaluations of particular successful case studies
 - Current research has not explored the long-term effects, sustainability, effect on local producers competing with competitive pricing and marketing strategies, and the value of these programs
 - Benefits and challenges of different models



Community/University Collaboration (partnership)

- Sub Node Three Community and University partners involved in the planning, development, and implementation of the Food Box Project:
 - KAP indentified the need to evaluate current program and program participants expressed the need for possible expansion
 - Project conceived at a Sub Node Three (SN3) meeting - Debbie Reimer (KAP), Garth Hazel (Community Consumer Cooperative), and Dr. Patty Williams (MSVU); proposal written by PW and DR with input from SN3 Steering Committee
- SN3 RA involved in ethics submission, data collection and dissemination provided input on project proposal
- SN3 Community Staff person coordinated project, collected data and conducted preliminary participatory qualitative analysis – to be completed by members of SN3 Steering Committee
- Community, University, and Student partners contributed to building, contributing, and anticipating project outcomes
- SN3 Steering Committee Members were involved in knowledge mobilization within and beyond the partnership through dissemination of the project outcomes to community, academic, and mixed audiences at academic conferences, community forum, and lunch and learn series



Project Methodology

- **Participatory action research and qualitative methods**
- **Data Collection**
 - Literature review to examine different food box program models
 - *6 Focus Groups (n=33) / 4 In-depth Interviews*
- **Purposeful sampling**
 - Current and past participants of the program
 - Others facing barriers such as low-income
 - Local producers and suppliers
 - Project staff
- **Data Analysis**
 - N-Vivo
 - Participatory Process
- **Community forum and next steps call for proposals**



Main Findings To Date

1. What is the value of the Food Box program to families and communities?
 - Addresses realities of being food insecure in rural NS:
 - Food access and supply barriers
 - Difficult choices - food quantity vs. quality; food quantity vs. personal choice
 - Connecting people and the community
 - Increasing access to healthy food for low-income families
 - Local needs
 - Contributing to skill building around food
 - Decreasing stigma
 - *“results in an improvement in the social atmosphere and viability of the community”*



Main Findings To Date

2. How can the Food Box program be enhanced, if at all?

- Providing more produce and less packaged food such as pasta, rice, and crackers which are not as difficult to access

3. To what extent would this program be beneficial to other families and individuals facing barriers?

- If expanded could also benefit low-income seniors, low-income individuals that are not eligible within the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, such as those with infants and school-age children, and those living in rural areas far from food retail outlets



Main Findings To Date

4. How, if at all, could the role of local producers and suppliers within the program be facilitated?

- Providing a means for 'alternative food networks'
- Exploring a means for surplus produce and products from producers and suppliers being distributed to those in need
- Creating a link to buy direct from the farm, increasing the exposure of 'buying local'
- Producers and distributors could contribute by offering alternative pricing for the value of supporting their community

However, there is a disconnect... *"How food is retailed in this society?... "They [large food retailers] are not helpful. Not helpful to producers. They are not helpful to consumers. They have their own agenda and it doesn't haven't anything to do with the betterment of society in general"*



Deliverables

- Community Forum on Food Security and the Social Economy - November 2007
- Brown Bag Lunch and Learn Series “Social Economy Community-University Research in Action” - November 2007
- Project presented as part of session on Food Security and the Social Economy at Food Secure Canada Conference – May 2008
- Expansion of the Food Box at Kids Action Program – Phase 2 research project currently under development by Dave Upton, NS Assoc. Community Business Development Corporations,
- Report to the Board of Directors Kids Action Program - Planned
- Published report and paper - Planned



How Students Benefited from the Project

- Student involvement:
 - Jessica Penner, SMU MSc. International Development Studies, SN3 Grad RA – Jan-Dec 2007
- Skills developed:
 - Planning and coordination
 - Proposal writing, ethics submission, qualitative data collection and analyses
 - Facilitation and oral communication skills, writing skills, community-based research skills including building relationships with community and academic partners
 - Presenting NS and community specific data on food security and CED and SES Project SN3 research findings to a variety of audiences.
 - Knowledge of and communication about issues of the social economy, as well as the positioning of the social economy in relation to issue of food security.
 - Complemented the graduate student's academic training in International Development with a focus on global food security issues.



Conclusions and Next Steps

Priorities identified and being addressed, in part, in Subnode Three Phase 2 Projects...

- Ways in which local producers and suppliers can be involved
 - Reciprocal relationships
 - Placing a value on community needs
- Improving access to local foods by low-income consumers
 - Alternative food distribution processes
 - CFS Programs that partner with local producers
 - Continued support from governments on poverty action (matching community mobilization)
 - Building awareness of the issues
- Build upon the Food Box Program and expand its availability and measure impacts on the social economy
 - Proposal under development

