



# Health Happens In Libraries



## St. Charles Parish Library Making Healthy Food Choices

Destrehan, Louisiana / Community Size Served: 52,681

### Primary Partners:

- Second Harvest Food Bank
- St. Charles Parish Department of Community Services
- St. Charles United Methodist Church – Matthew 25:35 Food Pantry

### *Community Engagement*

St. Charles Parish Library traditionally sponsors a “Food for Fines” drive in April, when patrons who donate food get a dollar off of library fines for every item they bring in. As a result, when a local food pantry needed a place to host donation boxes as part of its own “Need to Feed” drive, its leaders knew they could turn to the library. This initial connection sparked broader collaborative planning for an interactive workshop with community members who utilize food bank services. The workshop focused on how to read food labels to understand nutrition information, and how to plan and prepare healthy meals using food in a food box. Thirteen children and adults attended the April 2015 event, which was held at a local church food bank. Participants shared goals for attending such as learning to eat well to manage chronic conditions, and to model healthy behavior for their families.

### *Organizing the Event*

Prior to her current role as System Administration Librarian with St. Charles Parish Library, Jessica Delgado worked as a medical librarian. Her awareness of the power of accessible health information to support healthy behaviors, as well as the support from her library’s Public Relations and Adult Programming Librarian, allowed Jessica to lead planning with local partners that brought nutrition resources to community members in a safe and familiar context.

### *Factors that Contributed to Success*

📍 ***Creating clear and complementary roles for partners:*** Four community partners took part in this event, and each had a clear role to play. The Matthew 25:35 Food Pantry provided the meeting space and kitchen access, as well as most of the food for the cooking demonstration, which was conducted by the St. Charles Parish Department of Community Services. The Second Harvest Food Bank engaged participants in an interactive discussion about general nutrition and healthy eating. The library shared information packets focused on reliable online health resources, and introducing participants to the health and nutrition materials available in the library collection. The library also signed up guests and partners for library cards. All partners contributed to outreach and promotion.

📍 ***Holding the event at a familiar location:*** The target audience for this event was individuals who use food bank services. The decision to host the event at a food bank allowed for direct promotion to participants, as well as an accessible, familiar and safe space for them to discuss their healthy eating priorities.

### Top 3 Tips

Jessica shared the following tips for libraries interested in planning their own community health activities:

- 📍 **Play an active role in keeping partners aligned in planning:** In many community collaborations, particularly around specific events, clear “lead” organizations are not always explicitly identified to manage essential logistics like communications. Don’t be afraid to step up to this role, and help keep all partners on the same page about emerging plans. Jessica took an active role in keeping communication consistent and clear across all four partner organizations, relying on frequent emails and telephone calls to maintain momentum and proactively surface questions and concerns in the planning process.
- 📍 **Identify the regional medical library serving your community:** The National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) provides health information and support to organizations and individuals across the country through regional medical libraries. Jessica identified and engaged a representative from her regional medical library, who provided free consumer health materials for participants to take home, such as bookmarks and rack cards, as well as copies of past issues of *MedlinePlus* magazine.
- 📍 **Expect your network to grow:** New partnerships allow collaborators to develop a deeper perspective of the breadth and depth of local expertise and services, and strengthen local networks for referral and programming support. Through planning this event, Jessica learned that the local Department of Community Services has an economic hardship assistance program for community members. The library can now refer residents in need to this program, and is also considering opportunities to incorporate content on budgeting for healthy food choices into future programming.

### Looking Forward

St. Charles Parish Library will work with event partners again to provide this workshop in additional regional and branch locations, with two more workshops scheduled already. The library is also building from this experience to develop new programming and partnership ideas in preparation for the 2016 summer reading theme focused on wellness, fitness and sports.

“Working with local partners has raised our library’s awareness of food insecurity in our community, and the essential work other local organizations do to address it. Through collaboration, the library and local partners can deliver programs that provide intergenerational support about making healthy choices and accessing local resources to those who will most likely benefit.”

–Jessica Delgado, System Administration Librarian, St. Charles Parish Library