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Field Report

For my externship I worked at Vectors, an assisted living facility for veterans. Vectors is commonly thought to be a rehabilitation center, however it is not. The residents have to be sober while living there, but it is a transitional home and it gives them time to find a job and financially prepare to live on their own again. There is no exact time limit but residents are encouraged to be there no longer than 1 year although there are certain situations that are exceptions. The residents at Vectors have to go by certain rules and the agency's goal is to help them prepare to live on their own. I was unaware that a program like vectors even existed so it was interesting to actually be able to go there and see how it worked.

One of the main accomplishments at Vectors was cooking for them and giving them new ideas of delicious meals that are healthy. I think a lot of them ate the same foods over and over again and had very little variety in their diet. My partner Kristen and I showed them new, tasty ways to incorporate more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains into their meals.

Another accomplishment was our nutrition education. On most nights before we began cooking we would talk with them about various nutrition topics (fiber, food safety, etc...) They always seemed very interested and definitely had a lot of opinions which enhanced the discussion.

My objectives stayed pretty much the same throughout my time at Vectors. One difference was at first my goal was just to cook for them but as time went on I wanted to

teach them ways so they could cook for themselves in a healthier manner. I also wanted to give them tools to plan dinners using the resources they had and using any food that was going to expire before a food that had a longer shelf life.

I found out quite a bit of information about the agency's structure just by talking with the guys while I was cooking or just chatting during dinner. From what they told me they are 4 main requirements in order to live in the house. First off anybody living there must be a veteran, they must have financial need (they said you pretty much have to be homeless), they must be sober and remain sober at all times while living in the house, and they must have an interview and get approved by the head of the house. I know that they do get some money from the government although I am unsure of the exact amount and all residents do have to pay a certain amount each month to live there. Most of their food gets donated from Trader Joes. Each Tuesday Trader Joes donates large amounts of food to Vectors and is always trying to help them out. They seem to receive a lot of meat and also fruit or shelf items that are close to expiration date. They also hold a food drive a couple times a year where they take community donations. There are 13 men that currently live at Vectors and they range in age from 30's to 70's.

The nutrition education plan that I implemented was on food safety. When Kristen and I began cooking we noticed right away that much of their food was already expired. They had items in the refrigerator and cupboards that were very old and we also noticed that they would leave meat on the counter to thaw. After all this I knew right away what I wanted my nutrition education plan to be. It first began by going through their cupboards and refrigerator and tossing out old items. There were things that expired 7 years ago that were still in their pantry so it definitely needed a cleaning. Then I made

a poster board about food safety and presented it to the residents. That week the discussion became slightly heated with some of the residents having different opinions about meat and how it should be defrosted and marinated so it went a little longer than most discussions but it turned out well. Weeks following we noticed that the kitchen was much cleaner and they had also sorted through more items and organized them by the expiration date. Ben, the head of the house, said that he was going to make all the residents clean the kitchen more frequently and begin organizing the food when large quantities were received. I think our nutrition education plan did teach them a lot and motivated them to change some of their ways, hopefully long term changes.

Overall I enjoyed my time at Vectors. It helped me learn how to plan meals for a larger group and also try new things and experiment with recipes. I also think that I learned how to lead small group discussions more effectively and it made me more comfortable talking in front of a group. One of the things I got most from it was learning to interact with such a diverse group. If it weren't for this externship I would have never been around a group of veterans who are facing many challenges, financially and physically. It helped me learn about a much different group than I am familiar with which I grew from. I would recommend this site to another student. I think a key part is having two people at the site in order to manage the cooking and nutrition education. With one person it would be really hard to plan and prepare the meals for that many people, plus it is just nicer to have someone to talk to and work with. I am very glad that Kristen decided to help me out, it made my experience much better! The residents seemed to really enjoy having us come and said each semester they look forward to it so I hope that students will be able to go there in future semesters.