

Campus Pantry Lessons

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By Jason Adams

I recently had the opportunity to spend a day at PS21R in Staten Island, volunteering at one of Food Bank's campus pantry distributions. It was the perfect time to be at a school. With a year's worth of lessons almost behind them, students were thinking about how much they knew. The same could be said for me during my day of volunteering. As I passed out fresh pears and apples to the families who'd come to get food to take home, I realized that I was also measuring myself--figuring out what I knew about the scope of Food Bank's work.

Having been at Food Bank for three years, I've gained a solid understanding of the great work our Nutrition & Health Education team does throughout the five boroughs. Although I work in Fundraising, my job requires me to stay up-to-date on the entire organization. That's why I thought I knew what to expect when I volunteered at one of our campus pantries.

However, I quickly learned that there is no substitute for firsthand experience. Everything I'd read and heard about our Campus Pantry program up to that point was great--but it wasn't mine. That is to say, it's wasn't personal knowledge. Actually participating in the program allowed me to establish my own connections and takeaways.

What grabbed me most was the excitement and eagerness of the schoolchildren "shopping" for food with their families:

"Mmmm, black beans!"

"Tomatoes!"

"I love cucumbers!"

One girl in particular had a smile on her face the entire time. Picking from canned corn, carrots and tomato sauce, she convinced her mother that it was best to choose a variety rather than three of the same item. In fact, she already had her meal planned out for that night--pasta with a side of corn! She was trying her best to make the smartest, healthiest choices.

Getting the chance to witness and participate in this excitement added a personal layer to my understanding of our work. I discovered that the best way to learn more about what we do is to get out there and see it. Now, if I have to describe the Campus Pantry program to someone, I just have to think back to the enthusiasm of those children.

If you'd like to volunteer with Food Bank, sign up at <http://volunteer.foodbanknyc.org>.

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