

Just Say Yes to Healthy Eating

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by
Alane

Celeste-Villalvir

Earlier this month, Food Bank brought its Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables (JSY) 11-month cooking demonstration series to BOOM!Health's Harm Reduction Center. I am always a tad nervous about how new offerings will be received by our clients. JSY nutritionist Stephanie Alvarado arrived 15 minutes early to meet me and get situated for the first demo. Since there was no sign-up for the event, she asked how and when we would be announcing it to the clients. I told her that we could make an announcement, but that she should just set up in the café across from our kitchen and see how many people organically flock to her out of curiosity. Within minutes, Stephanie had a room full of clients asking her questions and actively engaged in the subject at hand. On that hot summer day, the demo was about healthy beverages and the crowd absolutely loved it!

At the end of the class, Stephanie and I discussed the turnout. We couldn't have been happier. The group loved it. These kinds of activities are incredibly powerful for our clients because they're educational AND therapeutic. People walk away with useful and practical information and, because the classes are engaging and entertaining, clients get an escape from the stress and pressures of the day to day. Our clients are predominantly homeless and unstably-housed people battling substance abuse in the Mott Haven area of the South Bronx. We also serve a growing immigrant population, people living with chronic illnesses such as Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS, people who are unemployed, ex-offenders, and LGBTQ individuals--in Mott Haven and the community at large.

As we planned for the next class--this time on increasing fiber intake--I couldn't help but still be

amazed that clients were so eager to engage in conversations about healthy eating! I am so happy that we pursued this program. Not only do I hope to implement it at our other food and nutrition program sites, I'm also going to take advantage of all the programs and services Food Bank For New York City has to offer. Thank you Food Bank!

Alane Celeste-Villalvir is Director of Food and Nutrition Services at BOOM!Health, a Food Bank For New York City member charity.