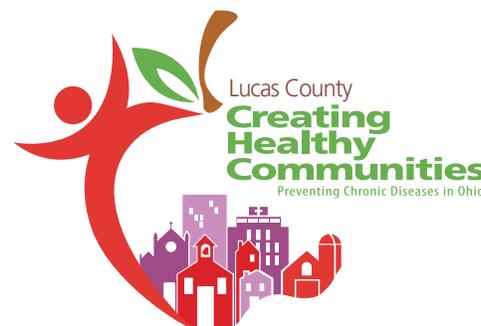


# Lucas County

## Local Food Pantry Helps Community by Offering Increased Food Options

### Summary

South Toledo is a neighborhood with many families living at or below the poverty level. Cindy's Corner Outreach Program, part of St. Lucas Lutheran Church, strives to provide emergency food assistance to community members in need. With the support of Lucas County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program and Ohio State University (OSU) Extension, Cindy's Corner was transformed from a food program that offered primarily a bag/box of processed packaged foods to a 'Client Choice Food Pantry' where patrons are provided education and guidance in making healthy food selections.



### Challenge

In 2011, approximately 17.3% percent of Lucas County residents were living below the poverty level resulting in an increased need for access to affordable and safe nutritious food, known as food security. Food pantries are becoming an important part of meeting food security needs for people in Toledo. With this in mind, Cindy's Corner initially addressed the problem of underserved families through various methods, which included pre-boxed food baskets. However, pre-bagged and pre-boxed food baskets can result in unanticipated results. The main concern is that food waste may be increased because clients are not familiar with the foods offered or have the skills and means to prepare them. Other concerns included lack of appropriate food donated to the pantry, lack of client buy-in for nutritious foods, and lack of nutrition education information for the pantry staff and clients. Lucas County CHC program, OSU Extension and Cindy's Corner have come together to find a solution for both the client and the pantry staff.

### Your Involvement is Key

The overall goal of this initiative is to increase access to healthier food options through implementing a 'Client Choice Food Pantry.'

You can help by:

- Learning more about how 'Client Choice Food Pantries' empower communities.
- Volunteering at your local food pantry.
- Donating nutritious foods to your local pantry.
- Obtain a copy of a 'Best Foods to Donate' flyer by emailing a request to: [maziarza@co.lucas.oh.us](mailto:maziarza@co.lucas.oh.us)

### Solution

CHC met with Cindy's Corner Outreach Program management to share information about the benefits of a 'Client Choice Food Pantry.' A toolkit with guidelines on operating a 'Client Choice Food Pantry' was developed, the pantry was redesigned and new shelving was supplied and installed. Resources were also developed to share with clients who utilize the pantry. CHC staff worked side by side with Cindy's Corner staff to organize food items according to USDA MyPlate guidelines and stock the new shelves. The pantry staff were trained on the 'Client Choice' guidelines and resources while helping clients make good food choices from the pantry. Lastly, the "Grand Opening" of Cindy's Corner Outreach Program was shared with the St. Lucas Church community, local community organizations and the media.



## Results

As a result of working with Creating Healthy Communities and the OSU Extension programs, Cindy's Corner Outreach food pantry became more client-centered and efficient. A 'Client Choice Food Pantry' improves the health status of those served by offering a better selection of food options, providing nutrition and health information, and arranging a grocery store-like atmosphere where clients can shop for the foods they prefer with some food selection guidance based on the USDA MyPlate guidelines. The 'Client Choice' model has proven to be beneficial for the clients and the pantry organization as well. It supports the dignity of the client and meets their food security needs. For the pantry, it limits waste and saves money.

An evaluation of the 'Client Choice Pantry' revealed the following:

- 89% of clients liked being able to make their own choices at the food pantry
- 89% of clients were able to find foods that met their special dietary needs
- 100% of clients enjoyed having fresh fruits and vegetables available

"We follow the 'Client Choice Food Pantry' model because we believe food is a personal choice."

- Theresa Johnson, RN Co-Director of Cindy's Corner

## Future Directions

The 'Client Choice Food Pantry' model helps to make patrons the number one priority and empowers them to make their own healthy food choices. Future plans include working with other local pantries to help them incorporate the 'Client Choice' model. Next steps for Cindy's Corner includes:

- Evaluating the pantry to identify needed changes
- Marketing the pantry to the community and stakeholders
- Securing healthy donations from local food banks, churches and individuals
- Training and educating pantry volunteers on the 'Client Choice Food Pantry'

### Contact:

**Tony Maziarz MBA**

**Amy Abodeely MEd, RD, LD**

Toledo-Lucas County Health Department

635 N. Erie Street

Toledo, OH 43604

maziarza@co.lucas.oh.us, abodeela@co.lucas.oh.us

