

Spotlight on AgeSpan's Reconnecting Elders Underserved through Nutrition Interventions with Restaurants (REUNIR) Program

Q&A with Derek Anderson, Director of Nutrition Services, AgeSpan

Note: This document presents an interview conducted by the Nutrition and Aging Resource Center to spotlight the work of ACL grant recipients and share practices with the aging network. Responses are presented verbatim.

Program Introduction

Our project is to partner with local restaurants to provide culturally appropriate meals to older adults of the Southeast Asian and Latino populations who are traditionally underserved within the community. We're looking to provide healthy meals, reduce social isolation, and increase social engagement.

Interview Insights

Tell us about the “why” and motivation behind your project.

There are not a lot of nutrition programs out there that provide culturally appropriate meals to older adults of the Southeast Asian or Latino population. So this was our motivation, to be able to provide that. Food insecurity is really high within that population, and it's especially challenging when you're looking at being isolated and alone. Our goal was to work within those parameters to find local restaurants that would meet those challenges.

We do a good job within the Latino population within our community, but some of the younger, more transient consumers can't fit into our traditional nutrition programs. This gives them the flexibility to be able to attend and get a culturally appropriate meal when it's appropriate for them.

How did you go about finding appropriate partners and partner organizations?

We were fortunate, right from the application process, to have a great partner in the Cambodia Mutual Aid Association to help us within the Southeast Asian population. They are embedded into the community. They have the necessary language skills, and it was a real bridge for us within that particular community. Within the Latino community, our headquarters is in a predominantly Latino population area, but we still wanted to meet with good community partners. We work with our local council on aging to give us some

good recommendations. And once word got out about our program, people sought us out, and local businesses did too.

In your opinion, what is the most important personality trait or strength someone would need to be successful throughout this project?

I can think of really two things. I think being passionate about it and trying to meet the needs of different communities was really important to us. And I think a little bit of patience too, because as we were getting flooded initially with referrals and people wanted to be a part of our program, we wanted to find the right partner that would work within our parameters and meet the needs of the community where we were trying to serve.

What do you wish you would've known prior to beginning the project?

Our initial survey that we did, and that we also conducted at six-month and 12-month intervals, was very long and extensive, great data, and we were really excited to be able to get that. It's really difficult to track some of our participants down for those. So I think if I had to look back, we'd probably shorten that survey, still collect the data that we really want, to show effectiveness and good outcomes. But for us, it was very challenging for myself and my team to be able to do that.



Learn more from the [Nutrition and Aging Resource Center](#), funded by the [Administration for Community Living](#) to build the capacity of senior nutrition programs funded by the Older Americans Act.