Evaluation of Mi Amore: A Food Rescue, Recovery, and Redirection Organization in Winthrop, Massachusetts

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Is Mi Amore effective in alleviating food insecurity among Winthrop households?
Food Insecurity

- Unreliable access to affordable, nutritious food
- 12.3% American households
- Long-term chronic disease, physical and mental
- Food Assistance program: government and private
- Barriers to access
Food Waste

● ⅓ of food produced wasted, 680 billion dollars
● Due to lack of storage, access, and communication
● Farms, restaurants, grocery stores, etc.
Food Insecurity and Food Waste in Winthrop, MA

- Rate of food insecurity in Winthrop ~12% is consistent with the US and state of MA
- Rate of food waste is 30-40%, reflective of national rate
Mi Amore’s Mission

- Rescuing and redirecting food: addresses both food insecurity and food waste
- Objective aligns with Mi Amore’s mission

“Mi Amore is a Winthrop, MA based project with the goal of helping feed Winthrop residents through food recycling and food donations.”
Mi Amore

- Founded by Jeff and Suzanne Carson in 2015
- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
- Food Donors: Winthrop Public School, Winthrop Marketplace, The Arbors, La Siesta Restaurante
- Recipients: 16 families: 4 elderly, 6 recovering from substance abuse, 12 children, and 4 single parents
Rescued Food

● Type of food
  ○ Fruits, vegetables, bread and milk
  ○ Event/function premade meals
  ○ Special holiday meals
  ○ Baked goods

● Quality of food
  ○ Imperfect, slightly bruised produce
  ○ Close to sell by date
How Mi Amore Works

- Recipients recruited through community stakeholders such as police officers, pastor, school nurse
- Volunteer pick up donations 3 times per week from various donors
- Recipients are contacted at least once a week for a delivery
Mi Amore

- Estimates
  - $500 worth of food rescued weekly
  - $15,000 worth of food at fair market value in 2017
  - Projected to rescue $25,000 in 2018

- Currently in process of applying to EPA Healthy Communities grant for expansion to East Boston and Revere
Do the recipients of Mi Amore find the services to be satisfactory and acceptable in alleviating their food insecurity?
Objective

To evaluate the perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and general concerns of the recipients of Mi Amore in order to determine if the services are satisfactory or acceptable.
Specific Aims

1. Study the perceptions of recipients in terms of satisfaction to determine Mi Amore’s role in alleviating their food insecurity
2. Note areas of improvement in Mi Amore’s services that would increase satisfaction
Methods

Four parts of evaluation:

1. IRB approval for human study
2. Study Design
3. Recruitment
4. Interviews
Methods

- IRB approval: 1 month
- Recruitment
  - Head members of 16 families contacted
  - No more than 4 times
Methods: Study Design

- Cross-sectional qualitative study
- Qualitative content analysis
Methods: Interviews

- 30 minutes, 15 questions, in person
- Open-ended questions
  - relationship with Mi Amore
  - circumstances that lead to food insecurity
  - feelings of anxiety and stigma around using food assistance programs
  - nature of received food and process of delivery
  - comfort and convenience of the services
  - recommendations for improvement
  - general feedback
- Recorded along with handwritten notes
Results

Recruitment

- 16 families: 4 dropped out of program, 3 scheduling conflicts, 2 declined due to stigma, 4 interviewed

Interviews

- Time: 25 to 30 mins depending on the flow and pace of conversation
- Location

Participants

- 1 elderly, 3 single parents
Results: Categories of Perceived Satisfaction

● Satisfaction with the type of food
● Satisfaction with delivery and communication process
● Extent of financial relief
● Improvements
Results: Themes

- Relationship with Mi Amore
- Supplemental Food Assistance Programs
- Stigma Around Using Food Assistance
- Additional Financial Relief
- Quality of Food
Results: Themes

- Delivery Services and Communication
- How Much Longer
- Suggestions for Improvement
Results

- All 4 recipients indicated that they are satisfied with the type of food donated by Mi Amore.
- All 4 recipients are satisfied with the delivery process and communication methods.
- 2 out of 4 recipients are satisfied with Mi Amore as a supplemental food assistance program. The other 2 recipients do not find Mi Amore’s to be crucial in alleviating their food insecurity. 2
- 2 out of 4 recipients have made suggestions for improvement to increase satisfaction. The other 2 recipients find Mi Amore to be satisfactory overall and have made no suggestions for improvement.
Discussion

1) All four of the recipients have been using the services consistently since the start of the program in 2016 and stated that they would continue using Mi Amore as long as they are food insecure.

2) Feelings towards Mi Amore among all four have been positive and appreciative.

3) All of the recipients appreciate the fresh produce and staples (bread, milk, etc.).

4) All of the Mi Amore recipients interviewed also rely on other food assistance and financial relief programs.
Discussion Continued

5) All of the recipients we interviewed believed that the food they receive from Mi Amore is inclusive of their diets as well as their culture.

6) All of the recipients we interviewed believed that the delivery services were comfortable and convenient.

7) All of the recipients mentioned that they would recommend using Mi Amore to households similar to theirs.
Discussion: Implications

● Mi Amore and Chronic Disease
  ○ Undernutrition and malnutrition
● Mi Amore and Mental Health
  ○ Depression and anxiety
● Future studies
Discussion: Strategic Recommendations

● Mi Amore’s Expansion
  ○ Based on the positive responses, expansion to East Boston and Revere is plausible
  ○ Evaluation of systemic, nutritional, and economical aspect required
  ○ Requires more funding, volunteers, and stakeholders

● Similar Food Recovery Programs
Strengths and Weaknesses of Mi Amore

Strengths

● Convenience, comfort, positive relationship between directors, volunteers, and recipients

Weakness

● Inconsistency, limited choices and options, dependent on donations
Conclusion

- Based on the findings, Mi Amore’s recipients perceive the services to be satisfactory and acceptable.
- The services are perceived as most beneficial to those who use other food assistance and financial relief program and use Mi Amore as a supplemental resource.
Strengths and Limitations of this study

Limitations

● Sample size
● Short timeline of the project

Strengths

● In-person interviews
● Recipient perspectives
QUESTIONS?

Winthrop, MA