Good Food-An Essential Part of Adult Day Health Care

For many of the hundreds of seniors and adults with disabilities that SteppingStone serves having a nourishing hot meal is a challenge. All our program participants have disabilities, many of which make food preparation difficult, if not impossible. Many live alone in small rooms that do not have kitchen equipment, usually single room occupancy units (SROs). Cost is also an issue given the very low incomes of the people we serve.

Access to good food is not only about nourishment, which is essential for seniors, but also about socialization and quality of life. To share good food with others, to celebrate a special occasion with food, is a fundamental element of human happiness. This is particularly important for seniors, for whom isolation and loneliness are serious threats to their health.

SteppingStone makes providing healthy food a priority, but it is also challenge. Many participants have restrictions on what they should eat based on instructions from their physicians. Some participants have health issues that make it difficult for them to eat or to feed themselves without assistance. Our participants are culturally very diverse and food preferences vary widely. This applies not just to
everyday meals, but to food associated with special cultural or personal events, such as holidays and birthdays. Finally, some clients need additional food on top of what is provided at their care Centers alone.

The process to meet these needs is monitored by the agency’s Registered Dietician, Aimee Yan, RD. Registered Dietitians Nutritionists (RD/RDN) are health professionals with specific training that is recognized by the Commission on Dietetic Registration and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“As the consultant RD for all four of SteppingStone’s adult day health centers, I spend about one day a month at each site. I complete dietary assessments every six months and conduct a diet order review every quarter for participants with special diets ordered by their primary care provider. I also provide nutrition counseling to participants who require more intensive education or evaluation.”

When participants first arrive at their Center, they are offered a snack. These vary within each Center according to the preferences of their participants, but all meet the US Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines for nutritional value and portions. Nicole Clause explains the process at Presentation Center:

“All of our centers receive the same lunch. We differ somewhat with our snacks. We have a general snack menu posted here at Presentation Center. (Whole grain rich bread or grain of choice -often oatmeal- along with milk or juice.) This is usually supplemented to include eggs cooked in a variety of ways plus fruit.” Nicole Clause, Program Director, Presentation Center.

Staff members at each Center add special snack or special occasion foods as well.

“Young Lim, our Center’s Kitchen Aide, sometimes finds special items at the food bank and staff will often bring in special treats. For example, Urszula Munka, our Center’s Registered Nurse, brought breakfast for everyone to celebrate her birthday. We had ham, cheese, sausage, bagels, tomatoes & peppers, strawberries & blueberries. Last month Dan Feng Wen, Program Aide, brought dim sum for everyone & Yamin Zaw, Occupational Therapist, brought a large box of fresh peaches. Anne Nguyen, Program Aide, likes to make Vietnamese noodle soups as snacks every couple of weeks. The participants always have snack options here at Presentation.” Nicole Clause, Program Director, Presentation Center.
Providing food to participants when they arrive allows them to socialize while they eat with each other. It also provides nourishment before they begin any therapies or recreational activities. We are aware that some participants may arrive at the Center feeling hungry.

A hot lunch is provided to all participants prepared by MoonChef - formerly Moonstar Restaurant. These meals are prepared at their central kitchen, delivered to our centers, temperature checked and portioned before serving to our participants. Each meal is designed to provide at least 1/3 of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of important nutrients that the body needs. Again, SteppingStone is keenly aware that for some of the participants, lunch may be the only substantial meal they have that day. Some participants will have additional dietary requirements as well.

"The meals provided by Moonchef are already prepared as low sodium and low fat with no concentrated sweets in accordance with dietary guidelines set by the USDA and the CACFP program. A few participants with medical conditions like advanced kidney disease may require additional dietary modifications such as low potassium in which case we may swap out certain high potassium fruits with an alternative." Aimee Yan, Registered Dietician.

Jimmy Goh, RN, Program Director, Mission Creek Center explains how this process works at Mission Creek Center:

"We make sure to adhere to the dietary care plan provided by Aimee and enforced by our nursing staff. This includes monitoring portions to account for blood glucose levels, special preparation for those with swallow or motor-chewing concerns (ex: cut-up or blended), weighted utensils/spill-free cups/straws to assist those who prefer to self-feed but require assistive tools to do so. Feeding assistance for those that require it is provided by a Program Aide or nurse." Jimmy Goh, RN, Program Director, Mission Creek Center.

The needs vary between Centers. Here is how they are met at Presentation Center.

"We follow MD orders for diet, and this is most frequently 'diabetic' here at Presentation. We also puree food and add thickener to liquids when prescribed. Some participants have preferences which are added to their meal card by the RN so that our Kitchen Aide is aware. For instance, no pork, no beef, etc. The Kitchen Aide then knows to ask the participants what they want for lunch and offers options if a food item they don't want for lunch is on the menu." Nicole Clause, Program Director, Presentation Center.

Lunch is a primary opportunity for participants to socialize with groups of friends, catching up over their meal. However, it is not the only opportunity, as every Center celebrates special occasions multiple times each month with activities that usually are centered around food. These may include personal events such as a participant's birthday, but
also include a very wide range of cultural events. The food for these celebrations varies widely and reflect the wonderful cultural diversity of SteppingStone’s participants and staff.

At Presentation Center this summer activities with special food included Filipino Independence Day, Father's Day, Juneteenth, LGBTQ+ Pride, Independence Day, Korean Independence Day, Watermelon Day, 49er's pep rally and Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. For the Korean Independence Day event the Center had homemade noodles, kim chi, and Korean fried chicken wings.

At Mission Creek Center the Juneteenth celebration featured food from a local restaurant, the Hard Knox Cafe on 3rd Street and LGBTQ+ Pride was celebrated with special pancakes. The Center is working on Turkey dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas and continues to celebrate participant birthdays every month with birthday cakes and cupcakes.

In addition to the robust efforts to provide nourishing and enjoyable food to participants in their Centers, many clients need extra help to address their food needs. One of the standard questions for new client assessments addresses food insecurity concerns. The vast majority of SteppingStone participants need help getting and preparing food in their homes. If this support is not already in place, SteppingStone social workers connect clients to other agencies that provide in-home support including CalFresh, Meals on Wheels, Self-Help for the Elderly, the SF-Marin Food Bank programs, and In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS).

On a regular basis participants need additional food support. To meet those needs, Centers provide food boxes which they take home from the Center or if urgently needed can be delivered to them.

SteppingStone’s commitment to ensure that our participants are well nourished and have food they enjoy is very strong as Executive Director, Daniel Gallagher explains below.

“Our goal is to eliminate food insecurity among our program participants and do so in ways that improves their quality of life. We want them to not only have the good nourishing food they need to stay healthy, but also memories of enjoying food with friends at special occasions. Good food is an absolutely essential part of adult day health care and every day we strive to provide it to the people we serve.” Daniel Gallagher, Executive Director, Steppingstone.

SteppingStone operates four Adult Day Health Care Centers in San Francisco. Nearly all program participants have their care covered by managed care insurance
(Medi-Cal, VA) so have no out-of-pocket expenses whatsoever. For more information visit our website: steppingstonehealth.org

Photos: (Masthead) LGBTQ+ Pride Day pancake breakfast at Mission Creek Center being prepared by Angela Arguelles, Social Worker Alliance and Naomi Childs, Social Worker
(Top left) Young Lim, Kitchen Aide at Presentation Center serving food from steam table for other staff to deliver to participants. Today's lunch is baked fish w/ basil teriyaki Sauce, cabbage & carrots, brown rice and banana.
(Middle 1) Aimee Yan, RD, SteppingStone’s Registered Dietician supporting all four Centers.
(Middle 2) Presentation Center participants posing for a photo while celebrating Korean Independence Day and waiting to open special foods sitting before them.
(Middle 3) Jimmy Goh, RN, Program Manager, Mission Creek Center.
(Middle 4) Nicole Clause, Program Director, Presentation Center.
(Middle 5) Sandia Bruno, Presentation Activities Coordinator, providing a vegetarian meal to a participant that requested it. He is being served black beans instead of the main course.
(Middle 6) Breakfast croissant sandwiches celebrating Labor Day at Mission Creek Center being prepared by Yeimy Barbosa, Yasmin Garcia, Moises Iquite and Gloria Bardales, Program Aides.
(Bottom) Taco assembly table for special event at Presentation Center.

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