



Nutrition after Incarceration: Findings from a Workshop Series

Practice Brief • July 2023

BACKGROUND

Individuals returning to the community after incarceration are often at increased risk for diet-related poor health outcomes.ⁱ Few opportunities for nutrition education are currently available. Further, trauma experienced before, during, and after incarceration can have negative impacts on diet and health.ⁱⁱ

WHAT WE DID

- We developed a trauma-informed nutrition education workshop curriculum for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, including general information about a healthy diet, discussion of systemic and structural barriers to healthy eating, and resources for accessing and preparing healthy food, specifically CA-grown fruits and vegetables.
- We hosted 12 workshops for 135 participants throughout California between October 2022 and February 2023, in partnership with community-based, justice-focused organizations. Individuals with lived incarceration experience facilitated the workshops.
- We evaluated the workshops using post-workshop surveys with participants, and semi-structured interviews with a small sample of participants and facilitators.

KEY FINDINGS

Nearly all participants reported gaining knowledge about nutrition. Of the 102 participants that completed surveys:

After the nutrition education workshop...



Additionally, 94% felt the workshop provided useful information and 81% reported an intention to eat more fruits and vegetables.

"Now since the workshop I have begun to not only eat vegetables with dinner, I eat vegetables with breakfast also" - Workshop participant



Participant enjoying a post-workshop food tasting (tostada with grape-jicama salsa).

Participants appreciated that the workshops were designed for individuals impacted by the carceral system. Participants valued that the workshops were facilitated by individuals with lived incarceration experience, which created an open and safe peer-to-peer learning environment. Discussions of food during and after incarceration resonated with participants' personal experiences.

"When I started to listen to it, and I started to relate to it, I started to think, 'oh, my God, that's me.' Like, I can, I can see myself in this." - Workshop participant

Participants valued the resources shared about accessing and preparing healthy food.

Participants appreciated learning how to access and advocate for fresh, affordable produce in their area, including applying for food assistance programs, using fruit and vegetable incentive programs, visiting local food pantries, and growing produce in community gardens. Participants particularly appreciated the recipes shared during the workshops and sampling a healthy recipe.

"Because, you know, people say, 'Oh, just Google it.' Well, if I don't know what to Google, or what the name of the place is, or the organization... There's so many resources out there, but there's no general listing or way to access it. So being provided those links and information was actually very, very helpful." - Workshop participant

Community-based organizations reported positive experiences hosting the workshops.

All 13 hosts that completed surveys reported positive experiences with the workshops and would recommend hosting workshops to other justice-focused groups.

100%

of host organizations reported having a positive overall experience hosting the workshop



Facilitators enjoyed sharing their knowledge with participants. They appreciated sharing their lived experiences and the trust it created with participants.

"I think for me, it was really inspiring. I love doing the work. I love connecting with people face to face and doing that outreach in general."

-Workshop facilitator



Workshop facilitators and hosts after a workshop held in a community garden in Compton, CA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants recommended continuing to offer the workshops. Organizers and participants suggested expanding them to include more hands-on components, such as cooking demonstrations. Facilitators suggested offering the workshops at transitional homes, which often have residents who have been incarcerated.

Participants felt that the discussions about nutrition, incarceration, and trauma demonstrated a need for improved access to nutrition education and healthy food during incarceration – even before coming home.

"I felt like I was getting some good information. I also felt like I was being heard. And I was hopeful that my sharing my experience, it was going to travel back up the pipeline, and impact my community that is still inside." - Workshop participant

ⁱ Impact Justice. [Eating-Behind-Bars](#). 2020.

ⁱⁱ California Department of Public Health | California Department of Social Services. [Trauma-Informed Nutrition. Recognizing the relationship between adversity, chronic disease, and nutritional health](#). June 2020.

Read the full report online [here](#).

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