

An Equitable, Inclusive, and Innovative Food Partnership

A Two-Sided Equity Challenge

HEALTH EQUITY

Supportive housing residents in San Francisco face persistently high levels of food insecurity, resulting in challenges maintaining good physical and mental health, housing stability, and community wellbeing. While many food programs exist to serve residents, there is a lack of consistent funding and on-site programs that provide accessible, high-quality, and culturally-relevant food.

ECONOMIC EQUITY

Working-class women of color and immigrant women are often excluded from the mainstream job market, including the formal food industry. Many low-income women successfully start and operate their own informal food enterprises. However, they face large risks and significant barriers to entry into formal industry due to insufficient financial and social capital that supports asset-building.

A Two-Pronged Equity Solution



Residents benefit from a flexible, free food delivery system that is accessible, high quality, and culturally relevant. Food security and a sense of community and human dignity all contribute to housing stability.

La Cocina entrepreneurs grow their businesses with stable revenue, skill building, and culinary autonomy. These self-sufficient businesses support entrepreneurs, their families, and the city as a whole, in addition to giving back to their community.

DISH residents rely on meals: “When you don’t have a kitchen to cook in, it’s really easy to go through those food stamps. I know the last two weeks I really relied on [the La Cocina meals].”

They enjoy the quality of the food: “The meals are so good – I sometimes wonder where I can buy them.”

“This food really tastes good and is what you would go out and buy. [Other services] are flavorless with lots of restrictions.”

The meals are convenient and accessible: “The convenience is that it’s already prepared so all you need to do is reheat it or warm it up.”

“It’s nice that you don’t even have to leave the building. We have a number of people who are shut-ins or for medical reasons aren’t ambulatory.”

La Cocina entrepreneurs gain access to a stable income that supports their business during unpredictable times: “It was a lifesaver in the darkness of the pandemic. There was no other income.”

“When we don’t have it, we miss it a lot. It helps a lot with payroll.”

They appreciate the opportunity to give back: “I’m doing this for the people who are underserved. There is an element of family here – like cooking for an uncle who can’t cook or take care of himself.”

They build skills while cooking culturally-relevant food: “We develop skills through this project. We need to think about quantities and how to work on a larger scale.”

“I like to share the taste of [my country’s] cuisine with as many people as possible.”

Quotes represent the program in participants’ own words and were collected as part of an ongoing evaluation conducted by Engage R+D.

The DISH x La Cocina food program fulfills multiple 2022 Food Security Task Force recommendations:

- Increase funding for on-site and off-site food programs in Supportive Housing and SROs
- Invest in neighborhood-level community-led food policy to support connectivity and collaboration among residents and CBOs, and ensure community members are adequately compensated
- Increase city investments and commitments to long-term, institutionalized funding for food supports and coordination
- Require and fund culturally-relevant and quality food and service provision
- Eliminate transportation barriers to food access