

Stocking the Pantry - Episode 2

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[00:00:11] Colby D'Onofrio: Welcome to *Stocking the Pantry*, a CalFresh Healthy Living podcast from Leah's Pantry, where we share fresh thoughts and fruitful conversations. On this show, we discuss any and all things community nutrition, food equity, and nutrition security. This is a space for thought leaders to share success stories and strategies for equity-centered and resilience-building initiatives.

We hope to foster collaboration and community, as well as leverage strengths among listeners, guests, and hosts as we share ideas and dreams of building a more equitable future where everyone has access to healthful nourishing food.

Welcome back to our conversation with Adrienne Markworth and Monica Bhagwan here on *Stocking the Pantry*. If you haven't heard part one, check it out now to hear the first half of this delicious discussion. Now, let's jump into part two.

As the landscape has changed for a TI approach, it's been, what, 18, almost 20 years now. How has that change in landscape and the change of structures as well affected programming at Leah's Pantry and your roles within the organization, and the organization's role within the landscape of nutrition education?

[00:01:42] Adrienne Markworth: Well, I think one major change that it happened with the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was the introduction of PSEs into the SNAP-Ed program. PSEs are activities that don't find their footing on an individual class or an individual relationship with one person but are instead looking at what are the policies, systems, and environments that help to drive decision-making, especially around nutrition.

PSEs might include working on school wellness policies or the Nutrition Pantry Program, Colby, that you work on. We have Wiser Dining, which happens in congregate meal settings. We know that in California there's a big effort in the local health departments to work at higher levels than just sites, to be able to say, "Okay, how am I supporting organizations or really community-level changes? How is SNAP-Ed involved in active lifestyle decisions? How is SNAP-Ed involved in procurement policies?"

Some of those really big things that are saying, "Well, people are going to get pumped up and excited about healthy eating, then they should be able to have equitable access to those foods wherever they are, whether that's schools, whether that's institutions, whether that's public spaces, whether that's food pantries, gardens." PSEs are really big and broad, hard to wrap your head around sometimes as a new implementer, but they are predicated on strong relationships.

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That can be with community members or site staff or elected officials, policymakers, government officials. When we look at what makes the most effective PSEs, it is largely PSEs that are grounded in strong relationships, which of course brings us right back to our trauma-informed focus on those connected and compassionate relationships that drive not only individual behavior change, but actually, as it turns out, also drive public changes and big systems changes.

A lot of it, when it comes down to it, it's just all about relationships between two people. Being in the right place at the right time, knowing when to make a suggestion, knowing what kind of policy is going to go over with somebody because you really, really understand their perspective. That has been a very big learning for me over the past 10 years or so, has just been how it really does all come down to listening to one another, understanding perspectives, being in a relationship.

Then you can make those policies and systems and environments more aligned with equitable access to healthy food or whatever your objective is. I think for new implementers, not feeling intimidated by the complexity of a PSE or thinking like, "Oh my gosh, how could I ever impact the procurement policy of my school district?" Instead, just saying, "What are the relationships that I want to build so that I can learn how to align with what the community is looking to do?" Just starting with that and then feeling that build because sometimes if you go from the other direction, it feels super overwhelming.

[00:04:43] Colby: Absolutely. I think that's just great advice in general of if you need to get from point A to point K, you can't skip over all the relationships that you need to get through B, C, D, E, and so on.

[00:04:55] Adrienne: In the beginning, we were doing a little bit of PSEs. Monica was doing some wellness policy work with some organizations in San Francisco. We didn't have a ton of structure around it. We weren't exactly sure what we were doing, but I think that that's fundamentally changed the program and brought a lot of really interesting conversations about community engagement and organizational level change and asset-based thinking.

I think from broadly at Leah's Pantry, being able to move out of a direct ed-only model and introduce programs like the Nutrition Pantry Program, Wiser Dining, now, Eco-Challenge, was really a great learning experience for us. Then as an organization, we could really learn about the socio-ecological model as it was. Not just as a theory, but understanding that relationship between an organization and then catalyzing that relationship into a PSE.

That's one major change that I think has helped to spur equity conversations in the program and reinforce some of the trauma-informed work. I think if you look at Monica's job, her job has changed completely over the past eight years. Monica, what is that like for you I guess? Going from primarily being coordinating workshops and teaching them

to all of a sudden writing curriculum that people around the country can't wait to sign up for?

[00:06:12] Monica Bhagwan: For me, my personality is to really dig into something and just explore from all ends. The process of just developing material just suits me really well. The more that we've branched into developing specific kinds of curriculum for different audiences, the more I feel like it just enhances the practice of thinking about what trauma-informed care or services or programs look like, and really gives me the opportunity to really listen to communities in order to have it inform curriculum.

We've developed this process of not just talking to the intended audience, for example, we are working on a curriculum for training foster parents, doing some really deep listening with those parents, but then expanding the scope of who's part of these conversations. We also talked to foster youth, even though they're not the direct audience of this curriculum, and to educators and program providers.

Listening to what they've been hankering for, what their constituents, what their audience has been asking for, what they've seen are the challenges. Then whether there have been the challenges of successful implementation and engagement and where they're best finding the entry points to access certain communities that might be more difficult. We're learning a lot now about working with dads and how it's a trickiness of engaging with fathers. SNAP-Ed programs don't seem to attract that many men. I could be wrong, but in my experience of doing them, these programs aren't in settings where men at least feel invited or are coming to.

That is a missing piece for education to really understand that there are people who may not be even coming into the space. We want to create programs that can find them and bring them in and find the places where they are meeting, so we're learning about that. For me just to dig deep into people, and people's experiences, bring that into the curriculum, and then see the curriculum go out so that other communities can take advantage of material that's really built around real human beings.

[00:08:33] Tee Atwell: Monica, I love that. Can you speak a little bit more to bringing people's stories into this curriculum or products? Why do you feel that that's important? What is it that gives it that oomph?

[00:08:49] Monica: I think when people recognize their story in the material they're learning or have it acknowledged, have room to acknowledge-- There's so many stories, but when we create material where that is acknowledged, they feel seen. I think people want to feel seen and related to, and have the experience feel like their own.

Mulling over a story-- A focus group that I did recently where the people, the gentlemen we talked to have lost custody of their children, and yet they're so passionate about being fathers. Thinking about how a workshop could really help them regain a sense of themselves as fathers. They wanted to talk about food. They wanted to talk about feeding their kids and how much they care about it. At the same time, they're dealing with some pretty serious life issues.

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Both things have to be available to them. Be able to feel like they can talk about what's real in their lives and how they can overcome those challenges and what support they need to be able to still feed their kids, and to still provide a meal on the table.

I think SNAP-Ed participants bring so much into the room already. I've had great experiences getting to just enjoy people in a workshop setting, that I just want to make that more of an experience for people, and that they can get more out of it. They can ask more questions and they can make it feel more relevant and applicable to their lives.

[00:10:27] Adrienne: I think what Monica is getting at, which is the overall principle here is, when I was reading SNEB's journal, JNEB, a few years ago and discovered Dr. Naomi **[unintelligible 00:10:39]** *Meaning of Food and Life* questionnaire and just thinking, "Oh, this is cool." What is this idea of meaning in these different domains of food? It's more than nutrition, right?

I think part of it was just this idea that we have to reframe any conversation about health and nutrition more broadly. You can't talk about it in a meaningful way if you're not talking about people's lived experience in other areas of their lives. When you think about how that intersects with the trauma-informed principles and you think about things like historical and gender responsiveness and intersectionality and mutuality and collaboration, peer support, I mean, every time Monica does a deep dive into one of these communities that she's trying to develop materials for, it's just reinforced for us.

When we were doing the older youth and young adults for Around the Table, what did we find? That one of the primary drivers for healthy eating for that age group was the ability to care for others. Well, without those focus groups, it still just made an assumption, "Oh, youth are thinking about themselves. It's about individual nutrition. How do people in the classes keep themselves from being unhealthy?"

What we heard time and time again from the focus groups with the youth is, "Oh my gosh, it was so cool. This idea was great. I already texted my sisters. I'm so grateful for my grandma. I want to help her because she's cooked for me for so long." It upends a lot of the very individualistic siloed messages that we sometimes develop into a more collaborative and cohesive understanding of food security, nutrition security, whatever it is.

We keep having to learn the lesson, right? It just keeps being reinforced. I think we're finally at a point where a lot of other people are willing to agree and buy into this idea that it's okay not to just only talk about my plate. As you really want people to have balanced meals with the right amounts of fruits and vegetables and limiting something, there's nothing wrong with that message. It's just how do you get to adherence seems to be a little bit broader and windier than some of the more very direct, very specific nutrition messaging has been over the years.

[00:12:57] Colby: I think you bring up a great point there, both Adriene and Monica. Monica, your point too, when we include people's stories and we have collaboration and
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mutuality and we lift up people's stories, other people see themselves in those stories. Maybe another father who's struggling to gain custody over his kid sees another father who was in that same position now has custody and the ways that that father is feeding his kids in a way that works for their family might be really inspirational to that first father. That can drive some positive change for folks.

If someone were to come up to that first father and say, "Well, you should just follow my plate," he's probably going to be like, "That's so out of my wheelhouse right now. That's just going right over my head." That simple personal story of how someone else made it work in a similar situation can be so much more powerful, even though there's all this research and all this time and all this expertise that went into my plate. Sometimes it's that understanding that we're all human, we're all trying our best, and we are each the expert of our own lives. Having that understanding as a basis, I think, can drive greater change and have a much more positive outcome in the end.

[00:14:08] Adrienne: Yes. We've seen the USCA follow up that with-- the latest version of the dietary guidelines really highlights taste, preference, budget. There is such a-- dietary patterns are different. There has been such a huge acknowledgment and embracing of multiple ways to be healthy, multiple wonderful perspectives about food and life that we've seen reflected in the federal messaging as well as in local SNAP-Ed programs.

I think that's one reason why the CalFresh Healthy Living Program and the SNAP-Ed programs in so many other states are really thriving right now. It's because it feels that people are engaging authentically. They're recognizing the wisdom in the room. They're recognizing the wisdom in their communities. That's being encouraged. There's some terrific conversations happening around evaluation and needs assessment, storytelling that are all asset driven and that are all really trying to be grounded in equity.

A lot of the leadership in the states that I work with are incredibly humble and incredibly open to learning and listening to a wide variety of people. That's reinforcing Leah's Pantry too. We certainly wouldn't want to be the only one talking about this. That would be a worst-case scenario. The best-case scenario is that we continue to talk about it and learn from one another, and then people go off and do their own wonderful things that are in alignment.

That's been the most encouraging thing for me over the past couple of years is it doesn't feel like a burden or a sell. It just feels like a pretty dynamic, interesting conversation. It just, for my personality at least, makes it a lot easier to keep going.

[00:15:45] Monica: Even when we first started talking about trauma-informed nutrition, our thinking was that facilitators and educators feel this and know this, and putting it down and formalizing it was really what we were doing to a large extent, so people can now officially walk the talk in their work. People, I think, have been recognizing this all along that there's more to nutrition, education, and community work than what's in black and white and guidance.

[00:16:19] Tee: That is perfectly said. You really talked about forging forward and moving with the shift and change and transition of everything. You mentioned these projects and curriculum and these trauma-informed approaches really being embedded into strategies around PSE or policy, systems, and environment change. You mentioned the Eco-Challenge or foster care, father-focused programs. I am so excited to hear what's in the pipeline. Let's hear about these new projects. I'm excited. What do you got? What are we introducing for the upcoming year?

[00:16:59] Monica: I was walking the dogs this morning and I was like, "Oh, my God. I know exactly what we need to do for this." I had a brainstorm. I had a brainstorm for one of the curriculum that's on deck, which is the early childhood curriculum. We've been talking with agencies and partners. We did a big call-out at the beginning of this year, end of last year, to agencies and partners and educators to help us get some angles for developing curriculum for dads, like I said, early childhood needs.

We haven't decided exactly who the audience would be for the early childhood curriculum, but serving that demographic. We also are working on a curriculum for older adults.

These are taking the Around the Table model and expanding them and refining them for those groups. We also are looking to develop a curriculum to serve newcomer communities.

In addition, we're developing modules that can be integrated into Around the Table or Food Smarts or really any curricula, movement modules, mindful movement, and helping to draw the connection with the body, the physical body, physical movement, and nutritional health so that they can be part of a nutrition education workshop.

We're developing curriculum post-COVID. The landscape has changed and lots of great partners have popped up to want to talk about it and help us to co-develop. We're talking to community members about their experiences and what their needs are around curriculum. That's what's coming up.

[00:18:43] Adrienne: Yes. I think there's things on the training side, too, that are also reflective of what does it mean to really create a network of competent people doing things. I remember a long time ago when I launched the Food Smarts Training Program, there was a little bit of nervousness about that like, "Oh my goodness. Are you going to train people to run Food Smarts? What's that going to do to the curriculum? Are you going to be able to have the fidelity? This is ours." This is coming largely from a board of directors that was working in a for-profit environment where there was some hesitation about sharing the recipe of the secret sauce.

Of course, we forged ahead and worked through that. Now we're thinking about a Master Train the Trainer program. We've got a training team, but now we've been working for 10 years to develop a really skilled network of facilitators for Food Smarts and now Around the Table. How do we recognize that wisdom while still maintaining those relationships, while still being able to support the network in the best way?

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CalFresh Healthy Living has funded us to create a master trainer program for this curriculum. When we design it, we are designing with this idea about collaboration mutuality, peer support, a couple of our trauma-informed principles, how do we learn from this? How does it not only benefit the communities? Because they would be able to be in charge of their own training and have very focused localized examples like how does Food Smarts look in this county, for example?

It also benefits us because we're putting a lot of our big listening ears all around and respecting people's experience and then folding that back into the organization. Just looking at that interdependence between the work that Monica does to create curriculum and then the people that are actually doing it, week in, week out, doing that, how does our training team, how does our networks team leverage community so that the curriculum that Monica's team creates is the best, has the most impact, and has the widest distribution?

I think just thinking through the whole cycle from development to training to maintenance, to then what's next? How do we continue to listen and learn and grow? That's a big effort of ours right now is just to put all those pieces in place. We have dynamic teams working on a lot of different aspects of that life cycle, but how do we make sure that that life cycle itself we really understand as a system?

A lot of that being grounded in collaboration and mutuality really helps you get there because then you're thinking, "Okay, what are we giving, but what are we receiving and what does that look like," and just this bidirectional information flow and really bidirectional like expertise flow. We might be curriculum specialists, but everybody that teaches our curriculum is a community specialist for their communities and just trying to find that balance, I guess. Something I spend a lot of time thinking about as I watch my team grow and just wanting to do that. That's what I'm really excited about for the next two years.

[00:21:49] Colby: I really love what you said there right there, Adrienne, about people not only being training specialists but when they go into their communities to provide these trainings, they are also community specialists. I was talking to a partner who is going to most likely get trained to be a trainer for our NPP, Nutrition Pantry Program, and they had all these questions, like, "Can we do this with your logo? Do we need to keep your logo here? Can we take this information to this place?"

We were like, "Yes. Once we give this information to you, we appreciate you keeping our logo on there because we have spent lots of time making this, but take it, we're not hoarding our secret to our secret sauce." They were kind of floored. They were like, "Oh my God, we just love working with you guys. It makes it so easy to do this."

Leah, who I was in the meeting with, and I were both saying that, yes, like we're not hoarding these secrets over here. We're not in a corner collecting our trauma-informed information and no one else can have it. We want people to be trauma-informed and bring these principles to their communities because when they do that, like you said, we

get that feedback, so we know how to make this more accessible, more relevant to people in their communities, and further positive change.

I think it really just goes against a lot of private-sector American ideals of, "I got the secret, so sucks for everyone else." We're saying, "Hey, we have this great secret. Who wants in on it?" I just love that so much and it makes this work really joyful, at least for me.

[00:23:24] Adrienne: Yes, I think it just goes back to this idea that you cultivate a theory of abundance instead of a theory of scarcity-

[00:23:30] Colby: Yes, I love that.

[00:23:30] Adrienne: -and that there's enough to go around.

[00:23:33] Tee: There's enough education to go around. [laughs]

[00:23:36] Adrienne: Yes. There's enough opportunity to go around, and sometimes by sharing, you create more opportunity. That's I think something that often gets lost, but we've seen time and time again at Leah's Pantry.

[00:23:48] Monica: When I approach partners and educators and the community, I'm listening for them to tell me what they need, what they want, and I'll build it. [chuckles] That's really the fun part for me is to-- I'm going to do the legwork for you. Just tell me what it is that is going to fill the gaps for you in tools that you need, and that feels like a service. I do feel of service to the SNAP-Ed community in that way.

[00:24:15] Colby: It keeps your creativity flowing too. It's like if we're giving the exact same cookie-cutter to everyone, like we said, being trauma-informed is not a place to get to. It's a mindset and that constant evolution of how can I make this program to fit your needs inspires creativity maybe not in a traditional sense, but you're creating something new to meet a need, and I think that's beautiful.

[00:24:38] Tee: I definitely feel and really want to reiterate how important it is for us to really empower implementers to go out there and own that they are, like you said, an expert of their community. We can give you the tools, we can give you the curriculum, we can show you how to implement it, but it's really your finesse, your niche, you that gives it that extra special sauce to really make it your own and to know that this is me.

I do know about this, I can own this and really share it with pride and honor and just comfort that you are coming and sharing it with the world. Hopefully, all those little seeds that are planted, they grow and blossom and flourish. We have been talking about Leah's Pantry and all of the really awesome stuff that's going on, but I think there's one thing that we might want to circle back to, where did the name Leah's Pantry come from?

[00:25:42] Adrienne: That's easy. I can answer that question. Although Leah Quinn is often asked if she is the Leah of Leah's pantry. No, my daughter is Leah. Leah Markworth, she's 19, she's in college. She was my only kid when I founded Leah's Pantry. Have subsequently had more, they will not get nonprofits named after them. [chuckles] I always say one is good.

I think she definitely gets a kick out of being the namesake even as she laughs. She does not enjoy cooking to the extent that I do. She does enjoy eating quite a bit, but she often worries that she's not following always in the footsteps of all the things we teach, but perhaps she'll grow into it.

[00:26:33] Tee: I would love to know and this question is for both, you Monica, and you Adrienne, what do you stock in your pantry whether that be metaphorically or literally?

[00:26:47] Adrienne: My pantry's changed over the past month. I recently moved in with my parents and my family of five and we are all now living together to support-- actually, it's really working both ways. We're supporting my parents and they're definitely supporting us. I've got things that my mom has in her pantry and things I want in my pantry and we're realizing, no, we like different brands of the same food or this is a must-have for her and something that I would never ever use.

My pantry is currently even a mystery to me right now, Tee, but I'm having a lot of fun, and it's actually amazing. The whole thing is working out really great so far. That is one area that I see some confusion sometimes when I open up my pantry and think, "What in the world is this in here? Oh, my mom must have gone grocery shopping, and this is one of her staples." [crosstalk]

[00:27:42] Tee: I definitely have to follow up. I definitely would like to learn a little bit more about how you decide how these pantries are going to now coexist with each other.

[00:27:53] Adrienne: The answer I think is just a bigger pantry. [laughter]

[00:27:56] Tee: I think that's always the answer.

[00:27:58] Adrienne: Theory of abundance. Let's just make enough room for your stuff and my stuff.

[00:28:03] Tee: How about you, Monica? What are you stock your pantry with these days?

[00:28:07] Monica: I have always been-- mostly my fridge and my pantry have mostly been condiments. I'm a condiment queen and that's how I manage to provide myself enjoyable meals, is have lots of condiments around, but unlike Adrienne, my household has shrunk since my teens, one moved out and one is with me part-time while he's with his dad, so I don't have to cook for a lot of people now.

I make smaller meals and yet my condiments come in handy. I seem to have more beans and tofu and vegetarian things around because my partner is vegetarian. That's been a big change as I have canned beans a lot and things like that in my cupboard that I didn't have for a long time as much.

[00:28:56] Colby: I absolutely love that you call yourself a condiment queen. I think that is fantastic. As someone who does a lot of meal prep, when you get to like day three of the same meal with the same sauce, you're like, "Ugh, God," but if you switch up the condiments, suddenly you have Asian infusion one day, Mexican infusion the other day, American infusion day three. It's all the same stuff. You just put different condiments on it and it's like a whole new world. I'm living in your footsteps, Monica. [chuckles]

[00:29:25] Monica: Yes. I have four kinds of mustard. I don't know if I have that kind of space, I should think about that a little bit. [chuckles]

[00:29:31] Colby: I'm jealous of your **[unintelligible 00:29:32]**. [crosstalk]

[00:29:32] Adrienne: I think you need more **[unintelligible 00:29:33]**.

[00:29:36] Tee: They serve a purpose. They all do. All right. I absolutely love that. I absolutely love what you're stocking in your pantry and giving us a little insight into what goes on. We're also able to see that it's also a reflection of our connections, of our personal loved ones, and the times we spend with them, and the times that when they're not there, as we can see, it's not just a pantry of food and nutrition, but those pantries change over time.

Those pantries change with the ebbs and flows of what life brings us. They are a reflection of what we have going on in our lives. I am also a saucy queen, and I love to throw sauce on everything.

[00:30:20] Adrienne: You are very saucy, Tee, and I love you for it. [laughter]

[00:30:23] Tee: Thank you very much. It sounds like we need to have a saucy condiment party.

[00:30:28] Adrienne: [chuckles] I'm so here for it.

[music]

[00:30:30] Tee: Thank you so much for hanging with us. I want to ask you this question. Do you know of any thought leaders or someone doing great work in your community? We would love to interview them and we'd love to hear from you. Find us online at leahspantry.org or on Instagram handle [@LeahsPantry](https://www.instagram.com/LeahsPantry) or email us at stockingthepantry@leahspantry.org.

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