

## Episode Six – Creating Inclusive Spaces for Participants with Disabilities (Transcript)

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**[00:00:18] Host:** Welcome to *Stocking the Pantry*, a CalFresh Healthy Living podcast from Leah's Pantry. We'd like to acknowledge our funder, the CalFresh Healthy Living program, an equal-opportunity employer and provider. 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 our ideas and dreams of building a more equitable future where everyone has access to healthful, nourishing food.

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Hello and welcome to *Stocking the Pantry*. Thank you for joining us today for our special series highlighting sessions at the upcoming CalFresh Healthy Living Forum. This year's CalFresh Healthy Living Forum will take place at the Hyatt Regency Orange County in Garden Grove, California on October 23rd through 25th. The forum brings CalFresh Healthy Living professionals together to share updates, successes, and new ideas among colleagues. This year's theme is Equity in Action: Supporting Healthy Communities Together. For more information and to register for the forum, please check out the link to the forum website in our show notes.

In today's episode, we are speaking with Cailin McLaughlin and Cristina Luquin, who will be presenting their session titled Strategies and Best Practices for Engaging Participants with Disabilities in Nutrition and Physical Activity at the forum on October 24th. They're both nutrition educators working for CalFresh Healthy Living at the UCCE Central Sierra cluster. Thank you both so much for joining me today.

**[00:02:24] Cristina Luquin:** Thank you for having us.

**[00:02:26] Host:** Cailin, I want to start with you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, how you got into this area of work, and what you do at UCCE Central Sierra?

**[00:02:36] Cailin McLaughlin:** Yes. Hi, everyone. I am a garden coordinator here with the Central Sierra crew. My job entails helping our nutrition educators with their garden-related projects. Up until recently, I was a nutrition educator serving Placerville area. I taught youth and adults nutrition education and did a bunch of garden projects.

**[00:02:57] Host:** Thank you for sharing that with us. Now, Cristina, can you tell us a bit about yourself, your current work, and how you found yourself in this role?

**[00:03:05] Cristina Luquin:** Yes, absolutely. Hi, everyone, again. I am Cristina. I'm also a nutrition educator for CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE Central Sierra. I primarily work in the South Lake Tahoe community of El Dorado County. I provide nutrition education to youth and adults in our community. Because I am bilingual and bicultural, I can also provide Spanish-speaking services to our community as well.

**[00:03:35] Host:** Awesome. Before we dive into talking about the session, I want to get a little bit of foundation laid down for listeners. The Pew Research Center estimates that one in four American adults are living with some sort of disability, and that includes both physical and cognitive disabilities. Can you tell us a bit about how your work intersects with people who have disabilities, as well as some of the challenges and successes you've experienced when working with this population?

**[00:04:05] Cailin McLaughlin:** Yes. I provide nutrition education programming to one of our sites here in Placerville called Mother Lode Rehabilitation Center. We're also known as MORE. This community center provides opportunity for adults with intellectual developmental disabilities. The past year we were able to provide more hands-on nutrition lessons that included cooking components, and the participants loved it. There's currently a waitlist for our up and coming sessions that will begin next month.

As far as challenges, before starting this work, I felt a little ill-prepared. When it came to adapting our lessons for our participants, I felt like I wanted to accommodate our MORE crew more effectively. This isn't my foremost knowledge field. I actually did some research. I took some professional development training called Developmental Disabilities training series out of Colorado State University in order to prepare myself to offer more adequate educational experiences for my MORE participants.

**[00:05:11] Host:** How about you, Cristina?

**[00:05:13] Cristina Luquin:** Then for me, I've been providing nutrition lessons for youth and adults at different SNAP-Ed eligible sites here in South Lake Tahoe. Throughout the years, I've just noticed some participants use mobility aids such as crutches or wheelchairs. However, disabilities are not always visible and so some participants have actually come up to me to let me know if there is some adaptation or modification that I may be able to do on the spot. Because again, this is information that is not always shared with us as educators ahead of time. That has been sometimes the challenge. The success is that I've been able to move forward and successfully adapt to what is needed.

**[00:06:03] Host:** The first word that came to my mind when both of you were speaking was adapt. It sounds like you're both very adaptive, whether you are in the classroom and in the spot, someone says that they need accommodations, or Cailin in your case, you took the initiative to educate yourself to make sure that you could provide appropriate curriculum for people who do have disabilities. I think you're not alone in feeling there's not a lot of guidance in this area. That's why I'm really, really excited to hear what y'all have to share at the forum. That leads me into my next question, which is: Why do you feel that this is an important topic to share about at the forum this year?

**[00:06:42] Cristina Luquin:** It's an important topic because having participants be able to comfortably engage in all planned activities is part of the learning. When an activity is not accessible or it's hard to do for somebody, that individual may have a harder time learning or grasping the information that we're throwing. I would actually like to share an example of what I'm talking about. This happened to me this summer with a group of adults. I had scheduled a physical activity at the beginning of five

nutrition lessons. The goal was to go outside the first 30 minutes and just walk around the neighborhood. Again, engage them in physical activity for about 30 minutes.

I had, again, previously planned three routes that we were going to walk. Again, this is part of my planning process. Knowing what's coming ahead. As part of that planning process, I was able to show participants a map of the routes the week before we would walk that route. On the third route that was going to be our mega challenge, I actually had a participant let me know that they would not be able to participate during that specific route because it had a very intense incline. She let me know why. It was because of a knee injury. They were going to be in pain. They already knew that they were not going to participate.

There was no accommodation as far as could they use a mobility aid or something like that. It was just, "I'm not going to do it if this is the route." I was able to, again, pose and ask everybody "How do we feel about this route?" Other participants voiced their concerns. Again, it was two more participants. Half of my participants by this time let me know that they were not going to participate in the walk.

As a last-minute adjustment, I was able to say, "Okay, we're changing the route. We will do an easier, at least no incline, route that, again, we can still challenge ourselves with, but there's going to be no incline." As a result of that specific change, we were able to get all six participants to engage in that final walk successfully. For me, I am hoping that our participants felt heard, they felt important. I'm important enough to have made this decision with the team. Also that they're valued as a participant.

**[00:09:39] Cailin McLaughlin:** I think a big theme, Cristina, I want to keep bringing back is not all disabilities are visible. If you don't have trust built in with your participants, they might not share them with you. It might be very hard for educators to know where they're limited in their giving access to their nutrition education. We're hoping, and I'm hoping, from this session educators are a little bit more aware ahead of time and just maybe think of accommodations or modifications that they may need creating of a plan B action.

We also are excited to share plenty of resources and training opportunity, including the one I took myself, as helpful toolkits to get ready to make these. The three keywords are adaptations, accommodations, and modifications. Those are like the three keys when it comes to appropriately planning a session, implementing the session, and also hearing from your participants, actively listening, and changing it up. Sometimes you plan an accommodation that they didn't need. They'll let you know when it's appropriate. I'm very excited to bring this topic to discussion and getting to hear from others' experiences.

**[00:11:03] Host:** I'm very excited to hear about that too because it's like there's adaptation on both ends. It's adaptation so that participants can enjoy the curriculum fully. It's also adaptation on the educator's end so that they can enjoy the participants enjoying the curriculum fully. Is there any other background or foundational information that you would like people to know before they attend your session?

**[00:11:30] Cristina Luquin:** Yes. I can add that this is going to be collaborative work between participants and the educator. This session will touch on personal experiences and tools to use when the collaboration is actually happening between educator and participants. It's definitely not one size fits all by any means.

**[00:11:55] Cailin McLaughlin:** I think it's important that people know this work as far as expanding our CalFresh Healthy Living programming and the creation of this best strategies and practices document we're going to highlight could not have been done without the help of our MORE staff and our MORE participants. Their wisdom and experience has been invaluable to not only myself but our CalFresh team as a whole. I'm just so pleased to have the pleasure to work with them because they have opened my eyes to so many different things I never even considered being a previous teacher.

We conducted many community meetings with the staff at MORE and our participants to continually get their feedback and know what areas we were excelling in. We asked them honestly, what areas did we need to improve in? What lesson activities didn't work? Was it not age-appropriate? Did it not accommodate appropriately? We made those changes based on those feedbacks. It is a long growing process and I am very thankful for this partnership, but I also want our educators to know that sometimes it is a long process and it takes a long time to build that trust and foundation so that you can do appropriate programming with these communities.

**[00:13:18] Host:** I'm hearing trust and communication coming up a lot in this conversation both among professionals and also among educators and participants. Leah's Pantry, we're always coming at things with a trauma-informed approach. Communication and trust are the basis of that. I'm not surprised, but really, really happy to hear that this approach is being taken across California. Can you tell me a bit about the main goals of this presentation and what do you hope will come out of sharing about this topic?

**[00:13:55] Cailin McLaughlin:** Yes. For me, I want our forum participants to get a feel for asset mapping. Having an understanding of seeing what your participants can offer you to develop that programming appropriately. The importance of building that community trust and laying that groundwork and being honest with them about your approach and how you can offer services.

More importantly, the importance of building authentic community engagement. If you don't have input from your community members, you can't really effectively do programming, especially with this community. I hope our policymakers and educators are interested in beginning work on SNAP-Ed-approved curriculum that would be specific to serving this community in the future.

**[00:14:44] Cristina Luquin:** For me, I would like for there to be more awareness of those around us. Again, going back to that saying not all disabilities are visible. Just being aware of that and having more awareness for one another, I think that's definitely important and something that I'm hoping other participants of this session get out of.

**[00:15:07] Host:** I hope so too. It's coming at it with, I was going to say universal love, but that sounds super kumbaya. A universal appreciation for each other and allowing those conversations to happen and allowing that communication to be open because exactly not all disabilities are visible, but that doesn't mean they're any less legitimate or any less impactful on that person's life. If there was one thing that you could tell people before they attend your session, what would that be?

**[00:15:39] Cristina Luquin:** For me, I would encourage them to be aware of their own biases. I know we all have them. Just making sure that you're aware of them. There's any personal issues, again, with some of these biases that you're having or maybe that you're not thinking of, again, just being aware of those. Being able to set those aside for a second and then walking into this room with an open mind to be able to receive information and hopefully learn for the educator to use.

**[00:16:14] Cailin McLaughlin:** For me, it's be ready to share your experiences and be honest with what worked and didn't work in the past. It's okay if your lesson wasn't successful. The point is to open conversation, maybe find strategies that would be better next time, or hear from others who had amazing programming. If you haven't worked with this population before, that's totally okay too. Everyone's welcome to join. You actually might not know if someone in your participant group has a disability or not. These strategies can be used regardless. All interested in expanding their reach in their community and are willing to go the extra mile are more than welcome to come.

**[00:16:55] Host:** I think you'll get quite a few of those folks. I think we've all done a lesson that we thought was going to go one way, and for whatever reason, it was a point of reflection, hopefully, and perhaps a learning opportunity. I think that if we have people that we can share that with, then we are able to do it better next time. Sometimes having those mistakes lets us know, "All right, well, good thing I did that because that doesn't work," so we're not going to do that again, or we'll do that in a different situation, but for this type of situation, something else would've been better.

Hopefully, there's that open communication among participants and among colleagues so there's collaboration. I feel like I'm getting a lot of a sense of collaboration and mutuality both in planning this session, in how the session is going to be delivered. I'm really looking forward to it. I'm really excited to see you both at the forum and to hear more about this topic in your session and learn some more about those tools that you're bringing. I love that people are going to be able to walk away with some hands-on, actionable tools to support their work.

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Before you go, I have to ask you both, what do you stock your pantries with? Both literally and/or figuratively.

**[00:18:23] Cailin McLaughlin:** I'm going to take the literal approach. This probably sounds really bad as a nutrition educator, but I always keep my pantry with chocolate-covered gummy bears. They're my absolute favorite thing. Some people consider them really gross when they hear it, but I've brought some to the office, and

we've stashed them in the drawers here. My colleagues loved eating them. They just hit the spot. I don't know what to say about it.

**[00:18:53] Host:** I love that. It's all about balance. Sometimes, you have to feed the soul, right?

**[00:18:57] Cailin McLaughlin:** Yes.

**[00:19:00] Cristina Luquin:** I'm also going to take this question figuratively. For me, believe it or not, it's coffee and coffee products. My pantry's definitely basic. I have some canned foods, primarily protein foods, so tuna, different types of beans. Then, I also have dry grains, so rice, pastas, oats, that kind of thing. That's my pantry.

**[00:19:32] Host:** You always have breakfast covered, it sounds like.

**[00:19:35] Cristina Luquin:** Yes. Favorite meal of the day.

**[00:19:37] Host:** Agreed. Especially because it involves coffee. I want to thank you both so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I'm really excited for this session and to see what comes out of it. Cailin and Cristina will be facilitating Session 2A: Strategies and Best Practices for Engaging Participants with Disabilities in Nutrition and Physical Activity at the CalFresh Healthy Living Forum on October 24th. In the meantime, you can connect with them on their website at [uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu](http://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu). You can find them on Facebook at CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE Central Sierra; and on Instagram at CFHL - UCCE Central Sierra. If you would like to get into contact with either of them directly, I'm going to let them share their emails right now.

**[00:20:42] Cristina Luquin:** My email is [cnluquin@ucanr.edu](mailto:cnluquin@ucanr.edu).

**[00:20:55] Cailin McLaughlin:** My email is [camclaugh@ucanr.edu](mailto:camclaugh@ucanr.edu). Before we sign off, we wanted to give a huge shout-out and thank you to many of our community members who helped make this possible. That would be our MORE participants.

Susie Davies, the CEO of MORE; Luanne McGowan, a MORE staff member; Jordan Postlewaite, another MORE staff member; Tracy Celio, the UC Master Garden Coordinator of El Dorado and Amador County; our fellow master gardeners who help and assist at MORE; Carmela Padilla, our regional manager; Mariana Garcia, our program coordinator for Central Sierra; Andra Nicoli, our CalFresh Healthy Living UC staff; Paul Tabarez, another CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE staff; Veronica VanCleave-Hunt, CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE Staff; Abbi Marrs, another CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE staff. The work wouldn't have been possible without all of your contributions, so thank you.

**[00:22:04] Host:** We would love to hear more from you, listeners. What are you most excited about for this year's forum? You can join the Leah's Pantry Peer Learning Community and tell us what you think. The link for that can be found in our show notes. You can also connect with other forum goers at that spot as well. We look forward to seeing you all at the forum. Stay tuned for more special CalFresh Healthy Living Forum episodes in the coming weeks. Until then, *ciao*.

**[00:22:34] Announcer:** This podcast is a product of Leah's Pantry made possible by the funding from the United States Department of Agriculture, the USDA, and their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an equal opportunity provider and employer. Visit [calfreshhealthyliving.org](http://calfreshhealthyliving.org) for healthy living tips. 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](http://leahspantry.org) or on Instagram handle at Leah's Pantry, or email us at [stockingthepantry@leahspantry.org](mailto:stockingthepantry@leahspantry.org). This podcast is a product of Leah's Pantry made possible by the funding from the United States Department of Agriculture and their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an equal opportunity provider and employer. Visit [calfreshhealthyliving.org](http://calfreshhealthyliving.org) for healthy living tips.

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**[00:23:46] [END OF AUDIO]**