



Food, Friendship, and Health: Working Together to Serve Seniors in North County San Diego



A Three-Year Evaluation of the North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program

December 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the assertions that the senior population is growing and healthy aging depends on access to nutritious meals and opportunities for socialization, Rancho Santa Fe Foundation set out to explore the needs of seniors in North County San Diego and the resources that were available to them. A 2014 needs assessment revealed that many seniors had limited support systems, were not financially secure, lacked access to nutritious food, and were not likely to travel to existing senior lunch programs. This fueled Rancho Santa Fe Foundation’s passion for providing “Food, Friendship, and Health” and led to the creation of the North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program (subsequently referred to as NCSC) in November 2014.

NCSC is a collaborative program managed by Interfaith Community Services and Dreams for Change. It operates five days per week at five lunch sites throughout North County, and functions much like a mobile senior center by providing affordable and nutritious lunches, socialization, community information, and recreational programming to seniors. The Rancho Santa Fe Foundation commissioned the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research at the University of San Diego to track key metrics and outcomes, evaluate NCSC’s progress in meeting its objectives, and provide feedback and recommendations for programmatic changes.

The overall results for the first three years of NCSC are impressive. While results varied somewhat by site, the overall number of meals served exceeded the goal (15,500 meals) by **80%** and the number of seniors served exceeded the goal (750 seniors) by **136%**.

The Numbers (from November 2014 through October 2017)

	Number of Meals Served	27,939		Number of Presentations	553
	Number of Seniors Served	1,768		Average Daily Attendance	36

In Their Words

“When I go out, I don’t buy fast foods anymore. This has come about thanks to the lunch program through education, learning and improving my diet.”

“I met so many friends and people through this program. We opened communications more in-depth rather than superficial.”

“I’ve attended the program since it started, it’s a break from what I do and it’s calming.”

The Impact



Nutrition

64% said they ate more nutritious meals since attending the program



Socialization

90% said they had more opportunities for socialization



Quality of Life

92% said the program had a positive effect on their life



Awareness of Services

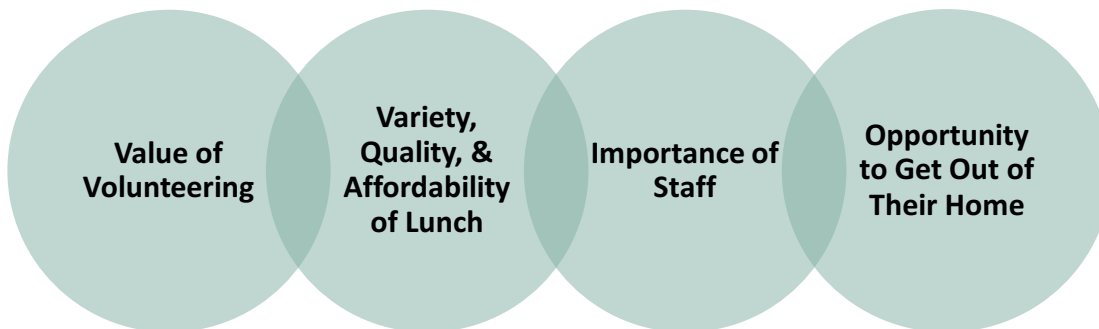
92% became more aware of services for seniors in the community



Satisfaction

97% agreed that they were satisfied with the program and would recommend it to a friend

Additional Benefits



Recommendations for The Future

Continue the NCSC program because it serves the vulnerable and growing population of seniors and it provides them with a unique opportunity to consistently experience “food, friendship and health.”

Continue to systematically evaluate the program and assess key outputs, as well as overall outcomes and impacts.

Amplify the NCSC story because it is an innovative program with demonstrated effectiveness that could serve as a model for other senior nutrition programs in San Diego County and beyond.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Similar to national trends, older adults are a rapidly growing segment of the San Diego County population. In 2010, San Diego County was home to 681,041 seniors (defined as age 55+), and that number increased to 724,269 in 2012, a six percent increase in just two years. The senior population in San Diego County continues to steadily increase and, at the current rate, the number of senior residents is expected to reach 1,149,045 by 2030.¹

This increase in the number of seniors translates to an increased demand for services that address the unique challenges this vulnerable population often faces. This includes chronic illness, depression, social isolation, limited resources, and poor nutrition -- all of which make it difficult for seniors to maintain a healthy, independent lifestyle.^{2,3}

One initiative designed to respond to these needs is the North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Food Truck Lunch Program (subsequently referred to as NCSC), a collaborative program initiated in November 2014 that provides affordable, nutritious lunches, opportunities for socialization, and community information to seniors in the northern region of San Diego County (North County). The program, which functions much like a mobile senior center, was developed and funded as a result of a needs assessment which found that many seniors in North County had limited support systems, were not financially secure, lacked access to nutritious food, and were not likely to travel to existing senior lunch programs throughout North County.⁴

NCSC is based on the premise that healthy aging depends upon seniors having access to nutritious food and opportunities to socialize and connect with others. Thus, NCSC's specific objectives for the target population of seniors in North County are to:



¹ http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/CHS/Reports/COSD_SeniorHealthReport_2015.pdf

² Ahmed, T. & Haboubi.N. (2010). Assessment and management of nutrition in older people and its importance to health. *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 5, 207-216.

³ Vesnaver, E., & Keller, H.H. (2011). Social influences and eating behaviour in later life: A review. *Journal of Nutrition in Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 30, 2-23.

⁴ Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research. (2014). North County Senior Connections: Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping. University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

Research on large-scale social change suggests that bringing organizations together around a common agenda can produce a collective impact that results in greater progress towards alleviating complex social issues.⁵ Guided by the four objectives presented on the previous page, NCSC operates based on a collaborative model that incorporates the efforts and resources of several organizations working together to support healthier lifestyles for seniors.

The *Thyme Together* food truck, operated by Dreams for Change (DfC), travels five days a week to five sites in North County. For \$2 per lunch, seniors can choose from eight menu options, including a weekly special that is rotated every three months. All meals are made to order, allowing seniors to make special requests to accommodate food allergies or health conditions. In addition to an extensive menu, the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank provides fresh produce for seniors to take with them to supplement and nutritionally improve meals prepared at home. DfC’s labor costs are offset by funding for its workforce development program.

Interfaith Community Services (ICS) manages the operations of the lunch program at all sites, including site logistics, marketing, registration, volunteer coordination, and scheduling recreational or educational presentations for the seniors during lunch. Volunteers at each site check seniors in, take orders, and deliver food to tables while seniors socialize. At the conclusion of each lunch, there is a drawing for seniors to win grocery store gift cards.

In addition to DfC and ICS, several other organizations contribute to the success of NCSC. Table 1 lists the collaborative partners working together to provide “Food, Friendship, and Health” to seniors in North County.

Table 1. NCSC Collaborative Partners

Dreams for Change (DfC)	Provides food, menu planning, food preparation, meal service, and food truck maintenance; tracks meals served; oversees social work interns (when available)
Interfaith Community Services (ICS)	Communicates with and tracks senior participants; serves as a liaison between NCSC and host sites; coordinates volunteers and onsite activities
Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank	Provides fresh produce (when available)
Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research (Caster Center)	Provides NCSC program evaluation services to RSFF (May 2015-Dec 2017)
Rancho Santa Fe Foundation (RSFF)	Provides initial NCSC funding (Nov 2014-Dec 2017)

⁵ Kania, John & Kramer, Mark (2011, Winter). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 36-41.

At the beginning of the program, NCSC operated at four lunch sites in North County. Following the program’s launch, service was expanded to also offer a brunch service at El Dorado Mobile Home Park, but this was discontinued because of low attendance. Several site changes have occurred since the inception of the program and today the program operates five days per week at five sites for lunch service (hereafter referred to as the five main sites). The current and historical (i.e., discontinued) schedule is summarized below in Table 2.

Table 2. Lunch Schedule and History by Site

Day	Site	City	Dates
Monday	Vista Village Mobile Home Park	Vista	Nov 2014 to Present
Tuesday	Palomar Estates East Mobile Home Park	San Marcos	May 2015 to Present
Wednesday	St. Francis of Assisi Church (St. Francis)	Vista	Nov 2014 to Present
Thursday	Palomar Estates West Mobile Home Park	San Marcos	July 2015 to Present
Friday	Rancho Calevero	Oceanside	June 2015 to Present
Discontinued	El Dorado Brunch	San Marcos	July 2015 to Sept 2015
Discontinued	El Dorado Lunch	San Marcos	Nov 2014 to July 2015
Discontinued	San Marcos Lutheran Church	San Marcos	Nov 2014 to April 2015

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

In May 2015, six months after NCSC launched, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation commissioned the Caster Center to conduct a program evaluation of the three-year pilot program.

The overall objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Evaluate NCSC’s progress towards meeting its objectives
- Provide feedback and recommendations for programmatic changes as necessary

This report presents the findings of senior participation in aggregate from the program’s inception (November 2014) through October 2017. It also highlights senior participation by site (when appropriate) and summarizes the impact that the program had on seniors over the three-year period.

Additional detailed information is provided in the appendices:

- Appendix A summarizes the NCSC Logic Model that was developed and used throughout all phases of the evaluation.
- Appendix B recaps the timeline for key program and evaluation components over the three-year period.
- Appendix C is the summary infographic that the Caster Center created in April 2016 for participating seniors and as a supplement to the first evaluation report.⁶ It illustrates key findings from the first 17 months of the program, as well as program implementation challenges and recommendations for improving NCSC. Many of the recommendations have since been implemented by ICS and DfC.

DATA SOURCES

The findings presented in this report are based on the following data sources:

Program Services Data

The Caster Center collected monthly reports from ICS and DfC that included daily, weekly, and monthly counts of number of meals provided, number of seniors served, and number of presentations offered. ICS and DfC also provided job descriptions, organizational charts, daily logs, and program reports, which were reviewed by the Caster Center on an ongoing basis.

The data collection process began in May 2015 when the Caster Center began its formal evaluation of NCSC. Any data from the first six months of the program (i.e., November 2014 through April 2015) were provided, compiled, and reported by ICS and DfC. Data provided by ICS prior to January 2016 were generated from their former Service Point software, and data collected since January 2016 were generated from their new CiviCRM software.⁷

Senior Demographic and Lunch Attendance Data

The Caster Center worked with ICS to acquire demographic data of senior participants, as well as their individual lunch attendance. The dataset was cleaned and all identifying contact information was removed. Any individual in the database under age 55 was removed for analysis purposes.

⁶ Ahearne, M., Davari, A., Tinkler, T., & Schumann, M.J. (2016). Food, Friends, and Health: An Evaluation of North County Senior Connections Thyme Together Food Truck Lunch Program. San Diego, CA: Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research, University of San Diego

⁷ There were ongoing challenges in ensuring program service data were completely accurate because of the change in software midway through the evaluation.

Caster Center Senior Survey

The Caster Center designed and deployed a survey to assess seniors' perceptions and attitudes about NCSC and the program's progress towards meeting its outcomes (see Appendix D for the senior survey). The survey was administered to senior lunch attendees on two different dates at the five main sites between January and March 2016. A total of 159 seniors completed the survey and the number of survey respondents at each of the five sites is summarized in Table 3. Approximately two-thirds (63%) of respondents were female and 82% indicated that they came to lunch at least 2-3 times per month. While the survey results do not represent all seniors who have attended the lunch program, they provide insight into how the program has impacted participating seniors.

Table 3. Number of Caster Center Survey Respondents by Site

Program Site	Number of Survey Respondents
Palomar West	48
Palomar East	35
Rancho Calevero	33
Vista Village	24
St. Francis	19
Total	159

Senior and Volunteer Focus Groups

The Caster Center conducted focus group discussions with senior participants (n=43) and volunteers (n=17) to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences with NCSC. A total of nine focus groups (plus one personal interview) were conducted between January and March 2016 (see Table 4 for a summary of the number of participants at each of the five sites). All participants received \$10 cash as an incentive to participate.

Table 4. Number of Focus Group Participants by Site

Program Site	Senior Participants	Senior Volunteers	Grand Total
Palomar West	9	6	15
Palomar East	11	2	13
Rancho Calevero	8	5	13
Vista Village	9	1	10
St. Francis	6	3	9
Total	43	17	60

ICS Senior Questionnaire

ICS designed and administered a questionnaire for seniors to complete during lunch at the five main sites during the last week of October 2016. Questions were open-ended and aimed to understand: 1) how the program improved seniors' diet and nutrition, 2) if the presentations had impacted their life and what topics they enjoyed most, 3) if the lunch program had improved their socialization, and 4) what areas of their life had been impacted most by the lunch program. A total of 98 seniors completed this survey and the number of survey respondents at each of the five sites is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of ICS Questionnaire Respondents by Site

Program Site	Number of Survey Respondents
Palomar West	20
Palomar East	16
Rancho Calevero	28
Vista Village	22
St. Francis	12
Total	98

Site Observations

The Caster Center visited each of the five main sites at least five times between May 2015 and July 2017, and recorded observations about different aspects of the program such as registration, meal preparation, serving meals, presentation content and style, and interactions between staff, volunteers, and senior participants.

Senior and Staff Interviews

The Caster Center conducted interviews with senior participants (n=11) and staff (n=3) to gain a better understanding of processes and implementation, and how NCSC has impacted seniors. Interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone in June and September 2017. Senior participants received \$10 cash as an incentive to participate.

Data Collection Caveat: Note that the findings presented in aggregate are based on data entered and tracked by ICS and DfC over the course of the evaluation period. Site-level findings are based on data retrieved by the Caster Center from the ICS CiviCRM database management system in November 2017. Efforts by the Caster Center were made throughout the evaluation period to reconcile data inconsistencies, including: 1) working with partners to clarify missing data challenges, 2) regularly checking for duplicate entries, and 3) developing new systems to track participant activity. All remaining discrepancies are beyond the control of the Caster Center.

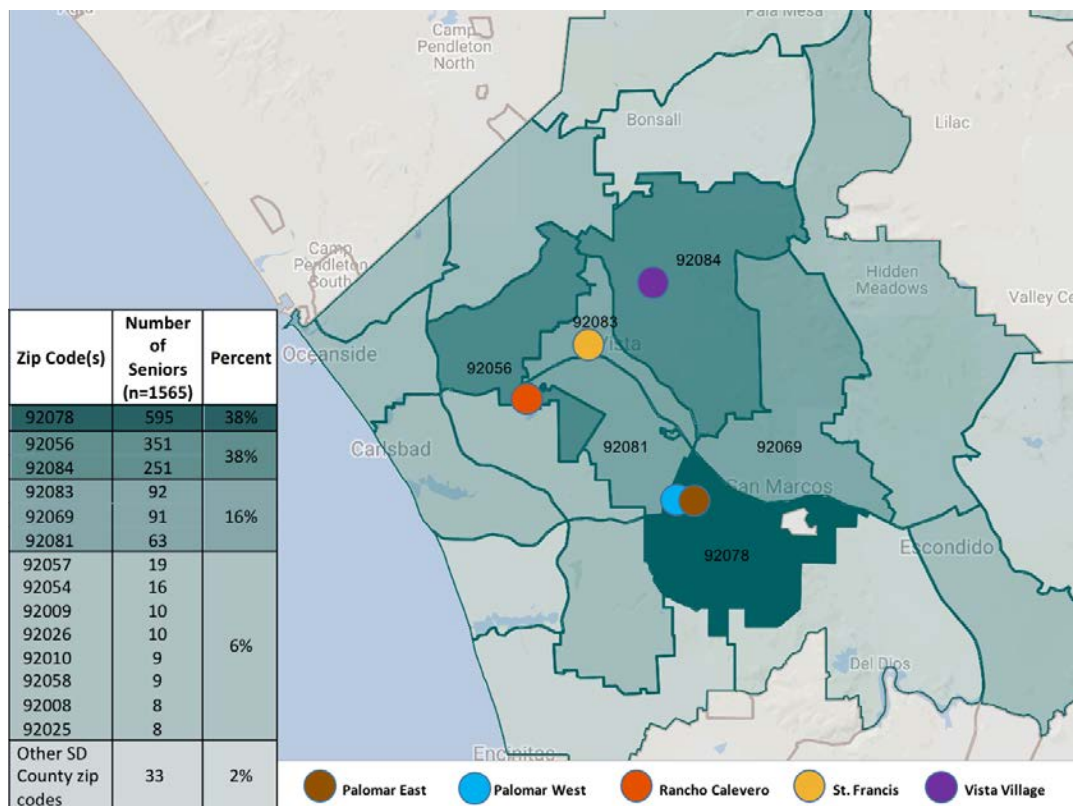
PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING SENIORS

In the first three years, a total of 1,768 seniors participated in NCSC. Figure 1 on the following page summarizes the demographic profile of program participants, and shows that the majority of participants were white⁸ (91%) and female (63%) with a median age of 73.

Figure 1 also shows that nearly one-half (46%) of participating seniors heard about the lunch program from a neighbor or friend and one-quarter (28%) saw it in a flyer at the mobile home park or church, demonstrating strong potential for advertising within the local senior network. Additionally, most seniors (70%) either walked or drove themselves to lunch.

Figure 2 shows the location of NCSC sites and the zip code distribution of NCSC participants. Of those who provided a San Diego County zip code, most (92%) reside in North County in cities where lunch sites are located. The largest concentration (38%) of seniors live in 92078 (San Marcos). This is logical as two lunch sites (Palomar East and Palomar West) are located in this region. When combined, the zip codes of 92056 (Oceanside) and 92084 (Vista) comprise another 38% of seniors served, also reflective of an existing NCSC lunch site (Rancho Calevero) in Oceanside and two lunch sites (Vista Village and St. Francis) in Vista. Eight percent of San Diego County seniors live beyond the cities where NCSC currently operates, with small numbers of seniors traveling to lunch from Poway, Carlsbad, Escondido and other parts of San Diego.⁹

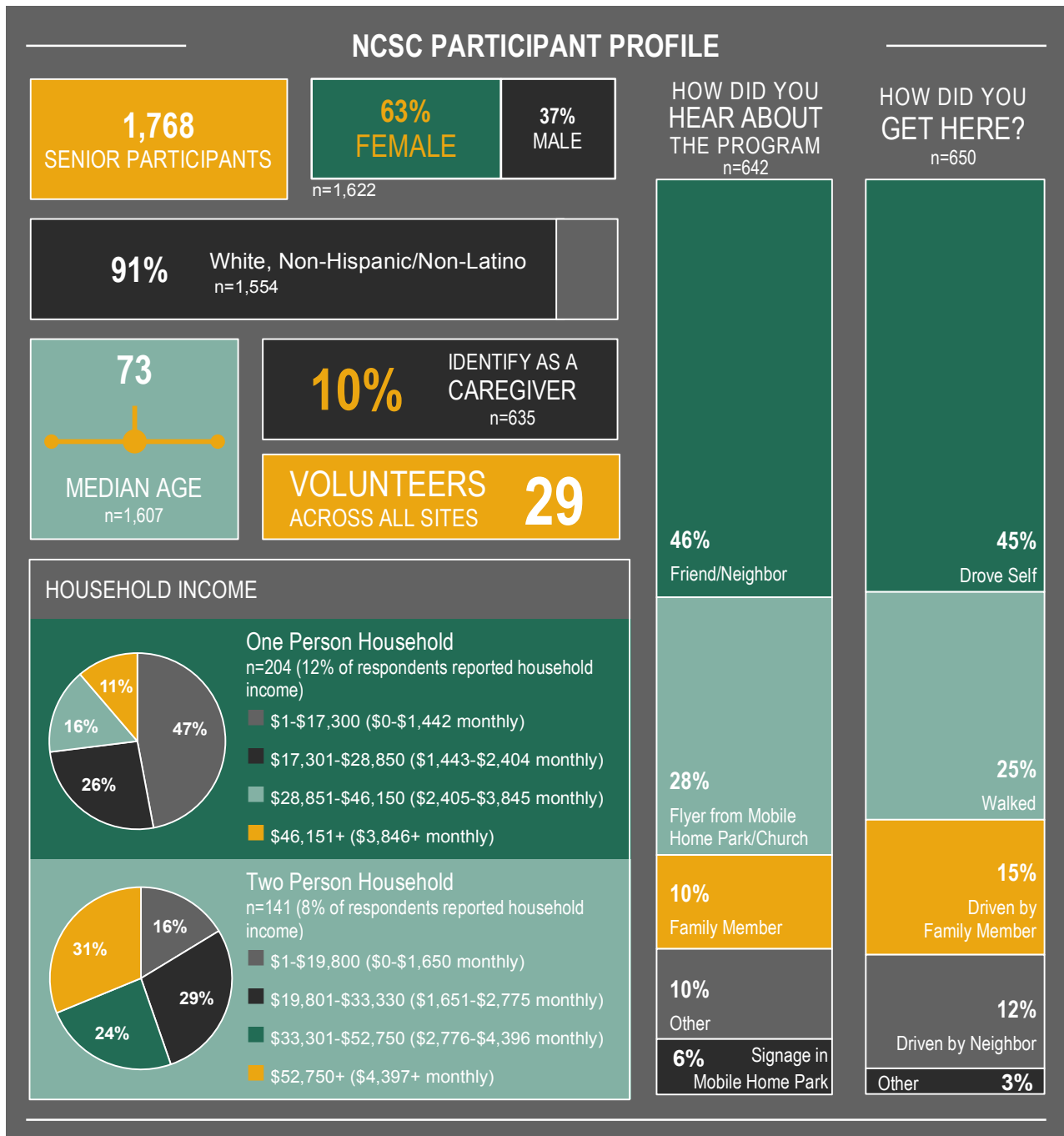
Figure 2. Location of NCSC Sites and Zip Code Distribution of NCSC Participants



⁸ Less than 6% of senior respondents across all sites identify as Hispanic/Latino, except for St. Francis, where 35% (n=329) of seniors identify as Hispanic/Latino.

⁹ 55 seniors reported a zip code that was outside of the county and/or the state.

Figure 1. NCSC Participant Profile



PROGRAM ACTIVITY

This section of the report presents total program activity for meals served, attendance, unduplicated seniors served, and presentations delivered to seniors, which correspond to the activities and outputs in the logic model (see Appendix A). Summaries of some key findings by site are also included. Unless otherwise noted, all findings are based on the three-year period of November 2014 through October 2017.

Meals Served

Since program inception, NCSC has served a total of 27,939 meals, or an average of 776 meals per month.¹⁰ The NCSC program launched with a target goal of serving 15,500 meals during the first 36 months, which it surpassed after 22 months in September 2016. At the time of this report, NCSC has exceeded its goal of meals served by 80 percent.



Figure 3 shows the number of meals served each month by meal type. In general, there is evidence that the program has grown and is beginning to stabilize, given that the total number of meals served from January through October 2015 (6,752 meals) increased by 29 percent over the same ten-month period in 2016 (to 8,715 meals), but increased by only four percent during 2017 (to 9,062 meals).

The highest number of meals served to seniors seated was in July 2015, followed by September 2016, and March 2017. Although the number of meals served to seniors seated each month varied by year, December has been consistently low, presumably because of colder weather and/or fewer service days around the holidays.

Since initiating the To-Go meal program in March 2015, an average of 101 To-Go meals were served per month. The largest increase in To-Go meals (86%) occurred from March to April 2016. Subsequently, the number of To-Go meals were consistently more than 98 meals per month. The highest number of To-Go meals served was in October 2017, which could be the result of increased awareness and/or seniors' desire to supplement their other meals throughout the week.

Meals served to seniors who volunteer are also tracked. An average of 73 volunteer meals were served per month.¹¹ The highest number of volunteer meals was in July 2015 and the lowest number was in July 2017.

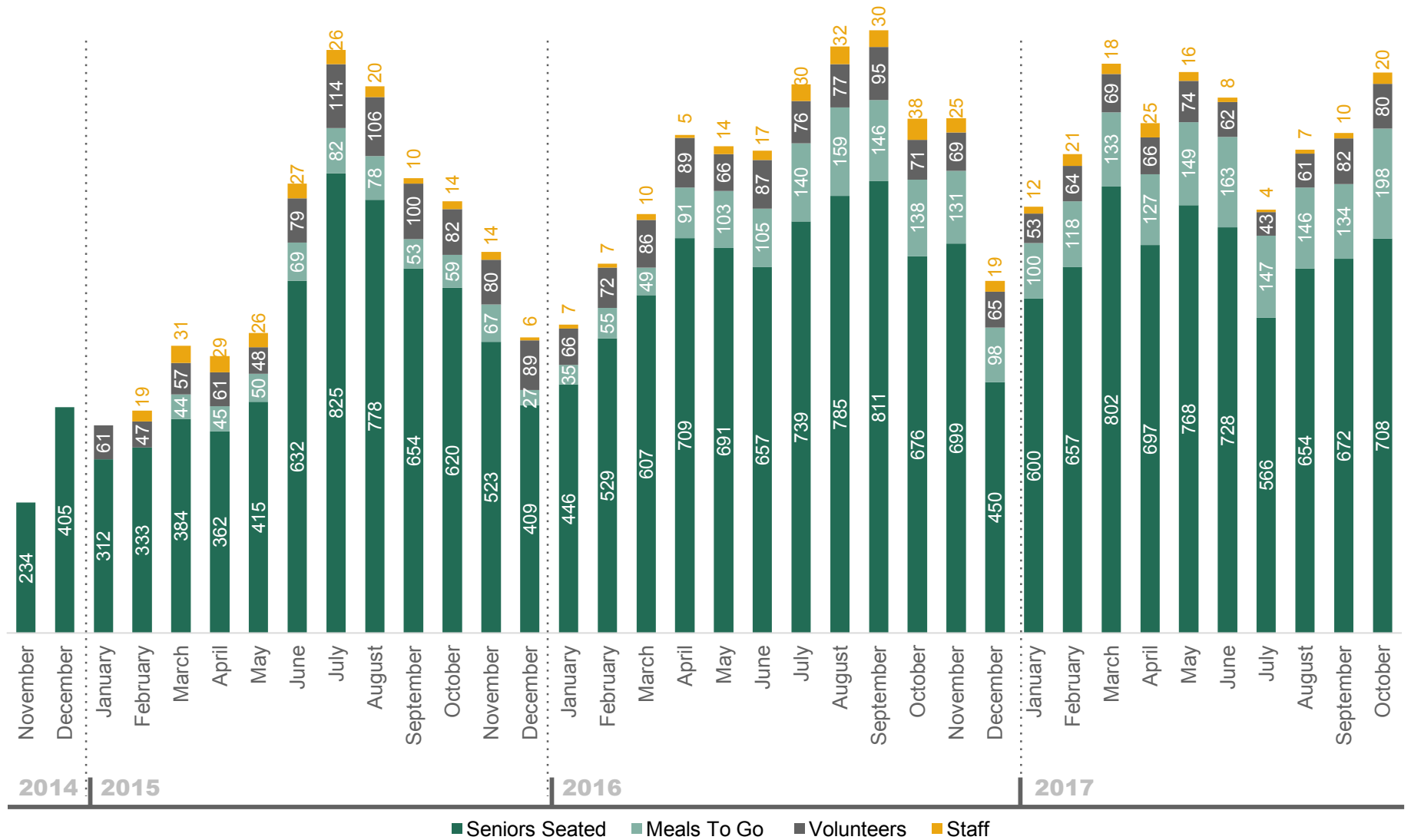
Staff meals account for the smallest type of meals served and vary significantly each month. On average, 18 staff meals were served each month, with the most staff meals served in October 2016 and the least in July 2017.



¹⁰ This includes meals served at discontinued sites (El Dorado and San Marcos Lutheran Church).

¹¹ Volunteer meals were not tracked in November and December 2014.

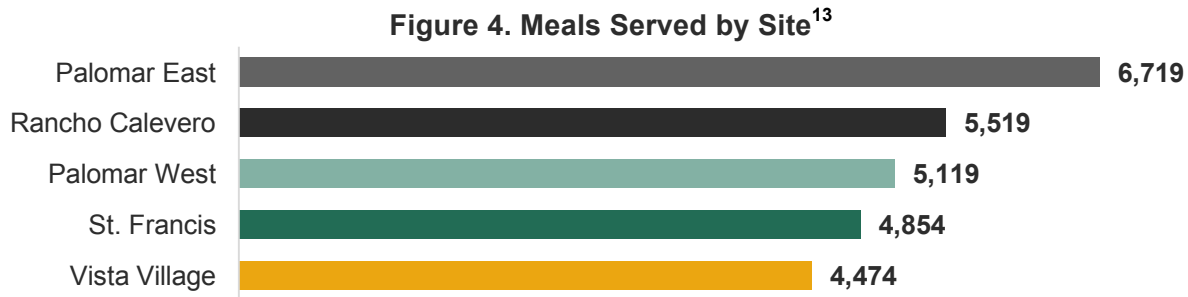
Figure 3. Number of Meals Served by Meal Type¹²



¹² Based on the DfC Tracking Workbook, provided monthly to Caster Center Team

Total Meals Served by Site

Figure 4 shows the total meals served by site (including seniors seated, staff, volunteer and To-Go meals). The sites with the least number of meals served were Vista Village and St. Francis. Palomar East had the highest number of meals served, which represents 25% of all meals served. This can be explained by Palomar East having more attendees, more service days, and twice as many To-Go meals compared to other sites.

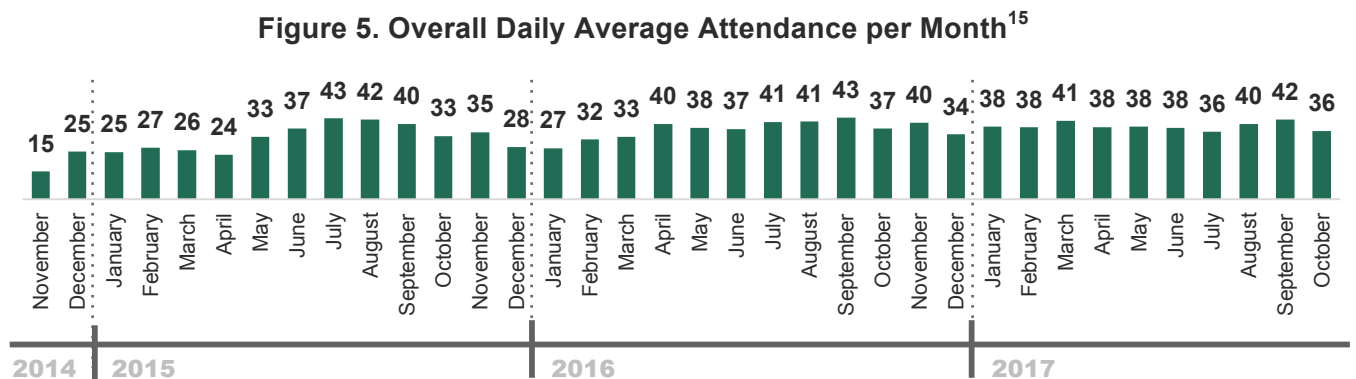


Attendance

Regular attendance is key to ensuring that seniors can reap the benefits of the program and NCSC can continue to operate cost-effectively. The following two graphs reflect attendance overall, as well as by site.

Overall Daily Average Attendance

Figure 5 shows the daily average senior attendance per month.¹⁴ The overall daily average attendance was 36 seniors, which is 28% below the target of 50 seniors per day. The highest daily average attendance was during Q3, 2016 (July, Aug, Sept) when an average of 42 seniors attended per day. Other than the month following the launch of NCSC, the largest change in daily average attendance was from April 2015 to May 2015 when it increased by 38%. Average daily attendance temporarily leveled out in the beginning of 2017, with five of the first six months of 2017 recording an average daily attendance of 38 seniors.



¹³ Based on the DfC Tracking Workbook, provided monthly to Caster Center Team

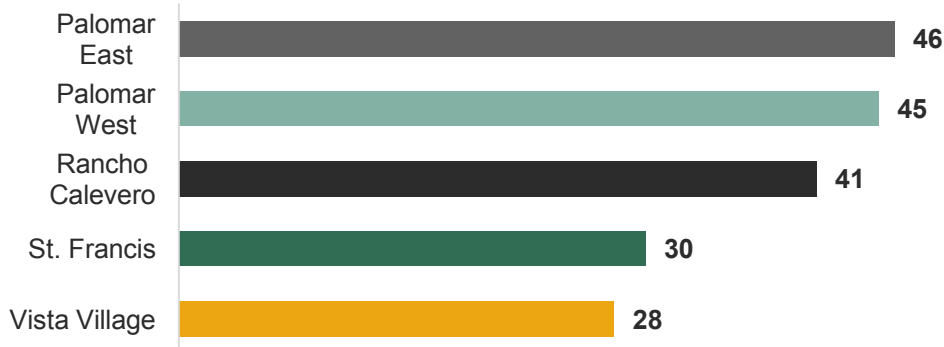
¹⁴ Daily average attendance is calculated by adding the number of seniors seated plus the number of volunteers, divided by the number of service days for the month.

¹⁵ Based on the DfC Tracking Workbook and ICS Daily Journal Log

Daily Average Attendance by Site

Figure 6 shows the daily average attendance by site. Similar to the total number of meals served by site, Palomar East had the highest daily average attendance, followed closely by Palomar West. Vista Village had the lowest daily average attendance, followed closely by St. Francis. Note that Palomar East serves an average of 64% more seniors per day compared to Vista Village.

Figure 6. Average Daily Attendance by Site¹⁶

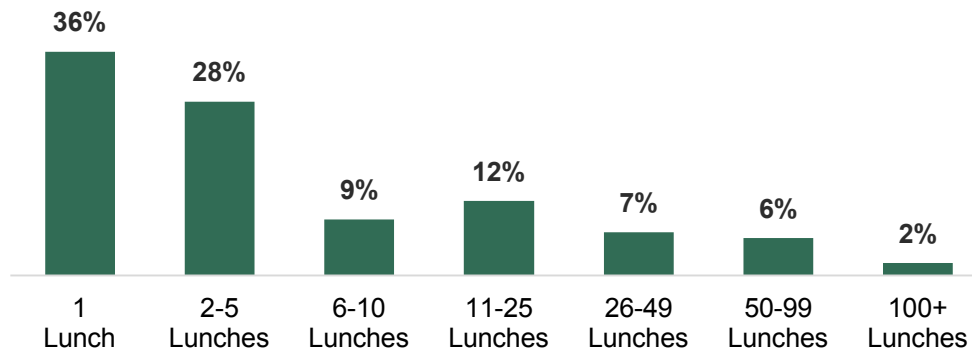


Frequency of Senior Attendance

Figure 7 shows the frequency of senior visits to the lunch program. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of participating seniors have attended the lunch program less than six times, with 36% attending just one time. Two percent of seniors have attended lunch 100+ times. One senior in particular typically attends lunch at the five main sites every week and has attended a total of 442 lunches. Other seniors with a high frequency of lunch attendance often attend lunch at two or three sites each week.

One Senior has
Attended
442
Lunches Since
Program Inception

Figure 7. Frequency of Senior Visits to Lunch Program¹⁷ (n=1,734)



¹⁶ Based on the DfC Tracking Workbook, provided monthly to Caster Center Team

¹⁷ Based on ICS CiviCRM data retrieved by the Caster Center in November 2017

Growth

In addition to daily attendance, increasing the number of unduplicated seniors served is essential to maximizing the impact of the program on the North County senior community, where there are many vulnerable seniors.

Unduplicated Seniors Served

At the outset of NCSC, a goal was established of serving 750 unduplicated seniors in the first three years. As depicted in Figure 8, the number of unduplicated seniors has steadily increased. It has culminated in a total of 1,768 unduplicated seniors over the past three years, representing 136% increase over the original goal. While growth in this area continues, the number of new unduplicated seniors was slightly less in Q1-Q3, 2017 (223 seniors), as compared to new unduplicated seniors served in Q1-Q3, 2016 (303 seniors).

NCSC Exceeded
Original Goal of
Serving
750 Seniors
by
136%

New Senior Growth by Month

Figure 9 shows the percentage of new senior growth by month. On average, new unduplicated seniors grew by 2.2% each month. However, the rate of new senior growth appears to be slowing down, as evidenced by a 1.5% increase in the first three quarters of 2017 compared to a 2.7% increase in the first three quarters of 2016.

Figure 8. Number of Unduplicated Seniors Served¹⁸

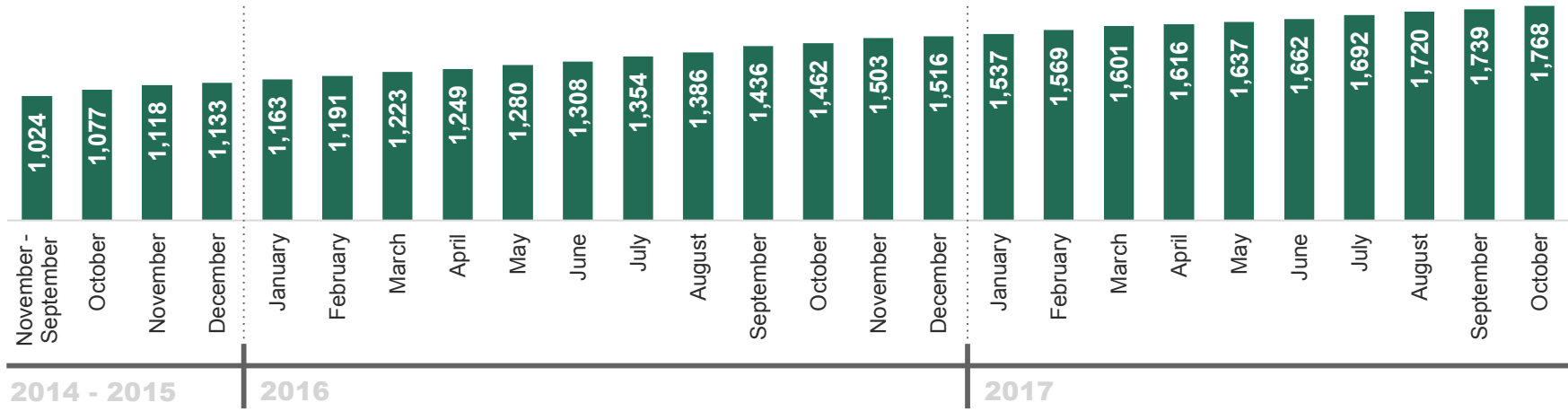
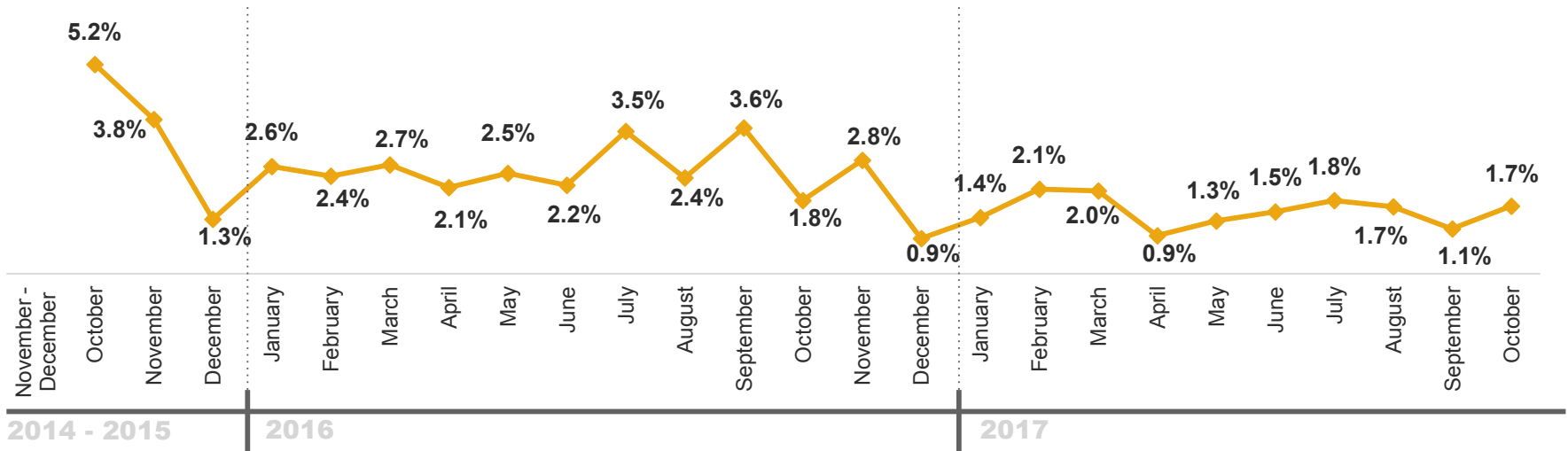


Figure 9. Percentage of New Senior Growth by Month

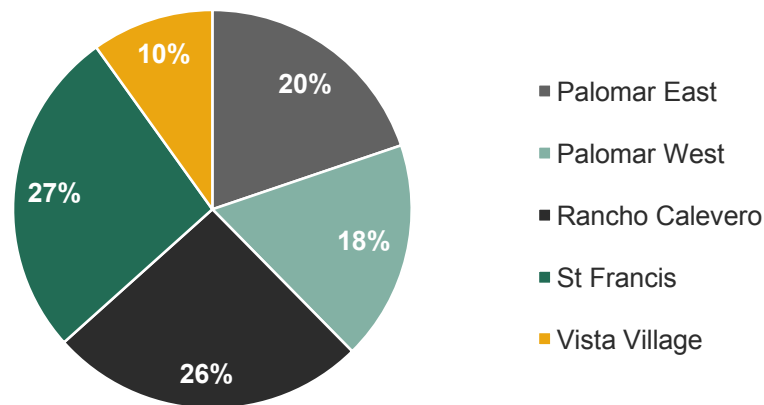


¹⁸ Based on ICS's Daily/Monthly Report provided to the Caster Center starting October 2015. Note that the 1,024 unduplicated seniors from November 2014 through September 2015 is an estimate, as described in the Quarter 1, 2016 Report.

Percentage of New Seniors by Site

From January 2016 through October 2017 there were 635 new seniors who participated in the lunch program. Figure 10 shows the percentage of those new seniors by site. St. Francis and Rancho Calevero account for the highest percentage of new seniors, more than double the number of new seniors at Vista Village.

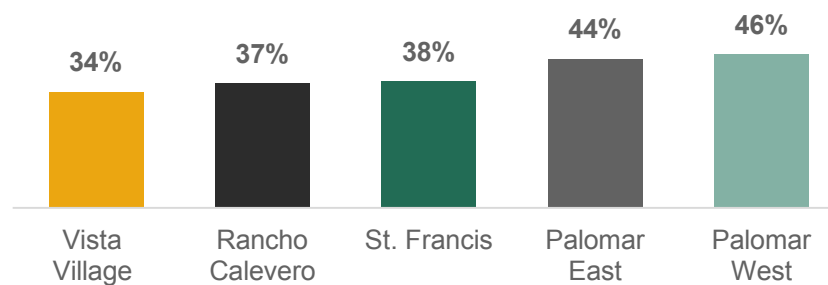
Figure 10. Percentage of New Seniors by Site (n=635)¹⁹



One-Time Visitors by Site

While recruiting new seniors to participate in NCSC is key to program growth, understanding the percentage of new, unduplicated seniors who do not return is also important. Figure 11 shows the percentage of one-time visitors by site. Palomar West and Palomar East have the highest rate of seniors who attend lunch once and do not return, while Vista Village has the lowest rate of non-returning seniors.²⁰

Figure 11. Percentage of One-Time Seniors by Site (n=1,734)



¹⁹ Based on ICS CiviCRM data retrieved by the Caster Center in November 2017, for which data was only available dating back to January 2016.

²⁰ Percentages were calculated for each site by comparing the number of seniors who participated at the site only once to the total number of seniors who participated at that site. Does not account for seniors who may have visited a different lunch site but never returned to the original site.

Daily Presentations²¹

A key component of NCSC is a daily presentation that follows lunch. Between July 2015 and October 2017, a total of 553 presentations were coordinated across the five main sites. Nearly 55 percent (n=301) of these were unique and the remaining 252 presentations occurred multiple times at different sites.²²

Between July 2015
and October 2017

553

presentations were
made

The content of the presentations varied greatly, but can be organized into two main categories, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Number and Type of Presentations (July 2015 - Oct 2017)

Theme	Total	Percent	Sampling of Presentations
Health & Community Services	178	59%	Southern California Caregiver Resources, Vista Sheriff's Department, Cal Fresh, Alzheimer's Association, Intergenerational Programs, Center for the Blind, Making the Most of a 10-minute Dr. Appointment, Fire Prevention, AARP Senior Driving Classes, Senior Self Defense, Latest in Prescriptions, ICS Veterans Services, Hearing Devices, Heart Health, Eating the Rainbow, Scams and Safety, Recycling Tips, Hospice, Meals on Wheels, Vista Yoga, Letters to our Troops, Dental Screening, Advanced Directives, Signs of a Stroke
Recreation & Culture	123	41%	Veterans Recognition Ceremony, Fine Lines Genealogy, Mobility Dodge Ball, Boot Scootin' Dancers, Alta Vista Gardens, Gettysburg Civilians, San Diego Regional Geology, Butterfly Farms, Moonlight Theater, Karate, African Violets, Stamp Collecting, Sunset Strummers Ukulele Band, USS Midway, Islamic Faith, Women Veterans Panel, Life in the Stone Age, Historical Newspapers and Their Stories, Patriotic Speech, History of Golf, Jeopardy Game, Family Feud Game, One Veteran's Story-Iwo Jima, Vista Senior Center Culture Caravan, San Diego Museum of Art Docent, Children's Christmas Program, Sunset Strummers, NOTEables

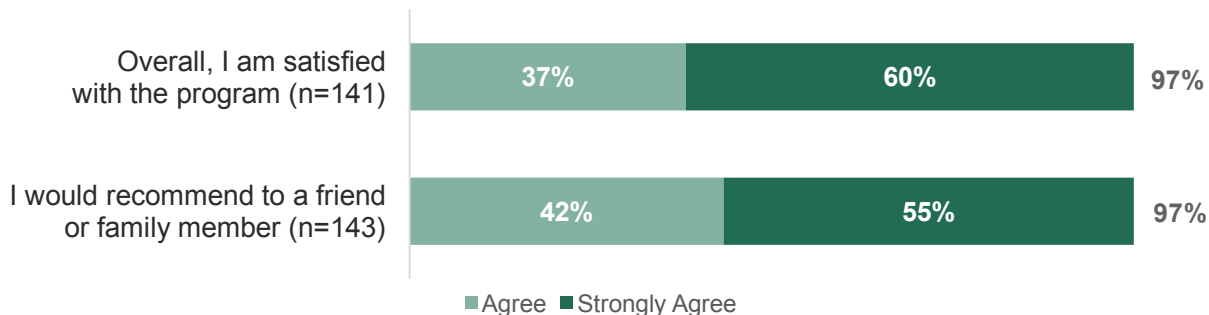
²¹ While presentations have always been part of the overall program, they were not tracked until July 2015.

²² Based on the presentation data from past Caster Center quarterly reports, Year 1 report, and raw client data for July-Oct 2017.

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

Overall, the seniors who completed the Caster Center survey (n=159) were very positive about NCSC and the impact it has had on their lives. Figure 12 illustrates that virtually all (97%) of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the program and would recommend NCSC to a friend or family member. This is a true testament to the quality of NCSC and the continuous improvements made by the collaborative partners.

Figure 12. Satisfaction Ratings



Observations and feedback from focus groups and interviews confirm satisfaction with NCSC.

**Senior Participants
2016**

“I love this program. It’s the first thing I ask [my husband] while we’re having coffee Thursday mornings. Lunch today?”

“I always invite my friends and remind them [to come] because we don’t want to lose it. We really enjoy it.”

“We appreciate the fact that this group [ICS and DfC] thought about us.”

**Senior Participants
2017**

“On the weekends, I miss the lunch program. I wonder to myself, what can I eat? Should I go out to eat? Should I eat leftovers?”

“I really couldn’t say anything to improve [the lunch program]. As far as I am concerned, it is perfect.”

Focus groups participants were asked to give one word to describe NCSC. As Figure 13 depicts, the seniors described NCSC very positively. Note that the size of the word represents how frequently the word was used.

Figure 13. Participants' Descriptions of NCSC



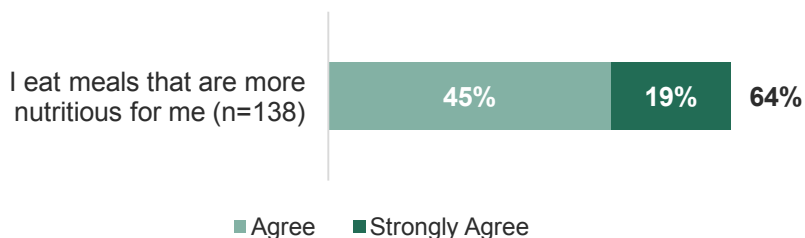
NCSC OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON SENIORS

NCSC identified four outcomes to measure its impact on seniors in North County: 1) improved nutrition, 2) increased socialization, 3) improved quality of life, and 4) increased awareness of senior services (see Appendix A for outcomes in the logic model). Progress towards these outcomes was measured through the senior survey, focus group discussions, and interviews with seniors. The results for each outcome are presented below, along with verbatims from focus groups with seniors in 2016 and interviews with seniors and staff in 2017. Note that the graphs represent the opinions of only 159 (or fewer) seniors who completed the survey, and should be interpreted accordingly.

Improved Nutrition

Figure 14 shows that 64% of seniors agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (19%) that since attending NCSC they now eat meals that are more nutritious.

Figure 14. Nutrition Ratings



Through the interviews, focus groups, and surveys, seniors explained that the food they ate during the lunch program was more nutritious and varied than the food they typically eat at home.

**Senior
Participants
2016**

“If I ate at home, it wouldn’t be as nutritional. It would be out of a can.”

“Being by myself, I don’t eat properly. When I come here, I get a nice nutritious meal.”

**Senior
Participants
2017**

“I ate a lot of TV meals since my wife was the cook and she passed away. Since I started coming to the program, I don’t eat too [many] TV dinners. I feel like the lunches are healthy meals.”

“I don’t cook so I tend to eat cheap fast food. I [come to lunch] Tuesdays and Thursdays so two days a week I get a nutritious lunch and dinner.”

Some seniors also conveyed that attending NCSC inspired them to eat healthier at home.

**Senior
Participant
2016**

“Since coming to the lunch program, we have started trying to improve our eating habits. We’ve been making our own lunches and keep on a quality diet.”

**Senior
Participants
2017**

“It has given me incentive...to improve my diet. I've loved the soups which have given me ideas for using different ingredients to make my own and to explore new ideas!”

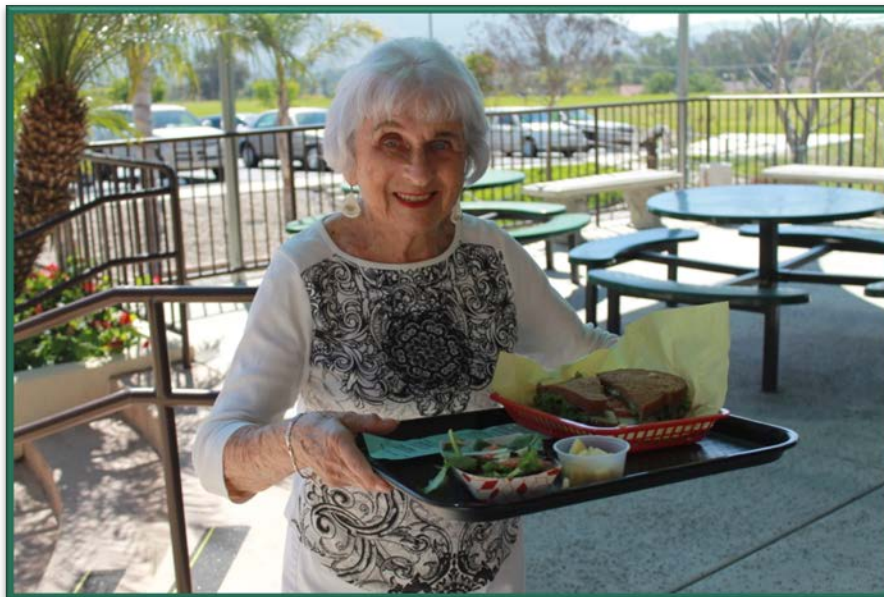
“When I first started, I began eating salad. Now I am eating more salad; I kind of like it now compared to before the program.”

Staff echo similar sentiments.

**Staff
2017**

“We have been told on a number of occasions that seniors eating habits have improved, that they are more likely to eat a little healthier or a little more food than they would normally have access to as a result of this program.”

“One senior approached me last week and told me that the speakers and the menu inspired her to eat better. She lost 45 pounds and is walking better and eating better.”



One of the services NCSC offers to seniors to improve nutrition is access to free produce provided by the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank. This feature was first added in September 2015. Initially, the produce was provided sporadically and was placed in large bins where it was difficult for seniors to see. Consequently, seniors did not take the produce home with them. However, in Quarter 1, 2016, DfC staff labeled the produce and displayed it aesthetically near the exit for seniors to remember to take it with them as they leave. Since early 2017, there have been storage issues and shortages and changes in staffing which has made it difficult for DfC to consistently offer and properly stage fresh produce for distribution at lunch. When it is made available, seniors appreciate it and gladly take it home.

16,200
Pounds of Produce
has been
Distributed to NCSC
from the
San Diego Food Bank

**Senior
Participant
2016**

“Whoever brings the garden stuff, thank them so much. They brought potatoes, onions. Please thank them so much. I appreciated the cabbage and onions so much.”

**Staff
2017**

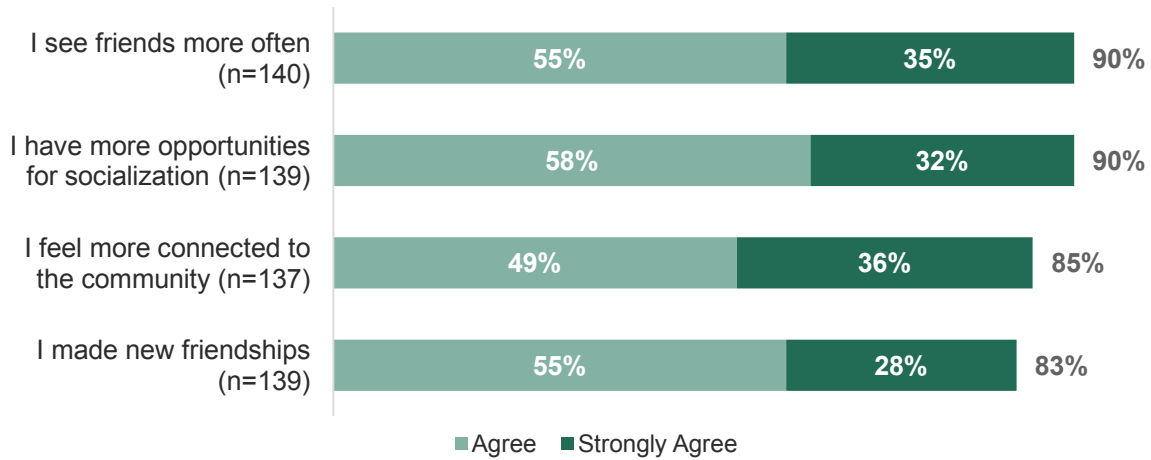
“Every site appreciates and utilizes the produce when we bring it. But Mondays, the seniors are like vultures. They can’t even wait for the produce to get off the cart. As we’re rolling it to the back table, they are swarming around, waiting to jump on the produce.”



Increased Socialization

As illustrated in Figure 15, NCSC has created a powerful opportunity for seniors to socialize and connect with friends. Nine out of ten (90%) seniors agreed or strongly agreed that since attending NCSC, they had greater opportunities for socialization and a greater ability to see friends. More than eight out of ten seniors agreed that they made new friendships (83%) and felt more connected to the community (85%) since attending NCSC.

Figure 15. Socialization Ratings



For many of the seniors who participated in the focus groups and interviews, socialization and fellowship were more important than the food. Seniors emphasized that NCSC provides a great platform for seniors to meet new people, renew and strengthen their current friendships, and give them a chance to connect with the community.



**Senior
Participants
2016**

"I have lived here for 15 years and I met people [through this program] I never knew."

"We know a lot of faces in the park but now we know everyone's name here."

"I've met new people who are now friends."

"A lot of programs have gone away. In some ways, this program fills a gap and gives seniors a chance to socialize."

"I like to get together with friends. I look forward to going out on Thursdays."

**Senior
Participants
2017**

"It has brought me to meet new people, to see people that I haven't seen for quite some time and have actually formed friendships with several people."

"We were new and coming to the lunch was a huge help to meet people from the park. Lots of them became very good friends."

"Before the lunch program, I ate lunch mostly at home. I have made a lot more acquaintances. I've opened up more, talk to more people, even strangers."

"Since coming to the program, I've become close to a lady here. We go shopping together. I help her carry her bags."

Staff echo these same sentiments.

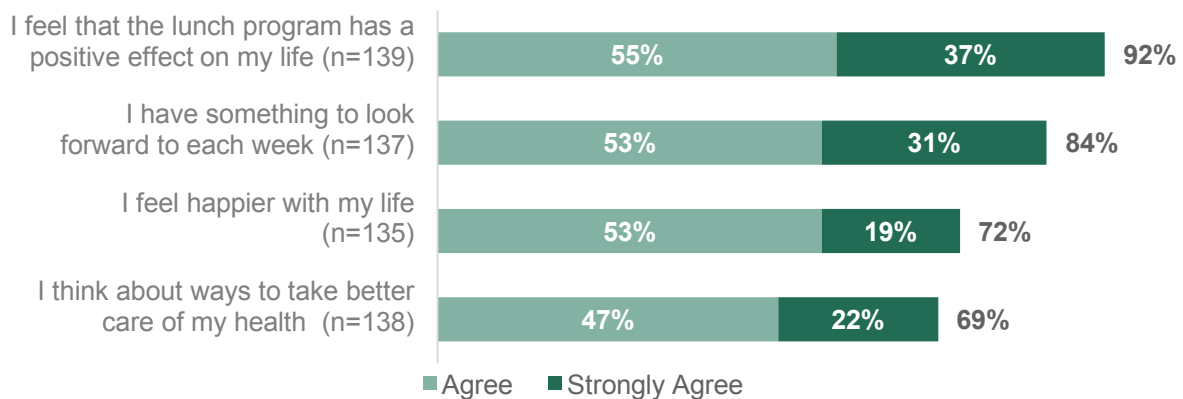
**Staff
2017**

"I think this program is such a big impact for seniors, on so many areas in their lives. I think it brings them to a place where they have purpose. A lot of time when people retire they just kind of sit around or maybe retire a little within their own little community...I think this program has brought them to realize it's not just within their neighbors, it's more than that. For instance, there are quite a few people that come to all of our sites or more than one site. They are able to get out and meet people outside of their little circles."

Improved Quality of Life

Survey results confirm that NCSC plays a role in improving seniors' quality of life and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Figure 16 indicates that since attending the program, seniors agreed or strongly agreed that the lunch program had a positive effect on their lives (92%), the program gave them something to look forward to each week (84%), they felt happier with their life (72%), and they thought about ways to take better care of their health (69%).

Figure 16. Quality of Life Ratings



Focus groups, observations, and interviews support the survey results. Seniors spoke of having something to look forward to, improving their health practices, feeling a greater sense of calm, and improving their mental health.

Senior Participants 2016

"I met [name] at lunch. I used to sit by myself and she came to talk to me. She's also a nurse and now she takes my blood pressure each week."

"I was a recluse and very unhappy and lonely [before coming to this program.] Now I feel very alive, interested in people who are so pleasant. [I] have joined the Social Club."

"I've gotten friendlier as a result [of this program]."

Senior Participants 2017

"I have depression and often do not want to be around other people. Because this lunch is so convenient, I sometimes coax myself to come, and when I get here, I enjoy the company and conversation."

"I get up and get dressed with something to look forward to."

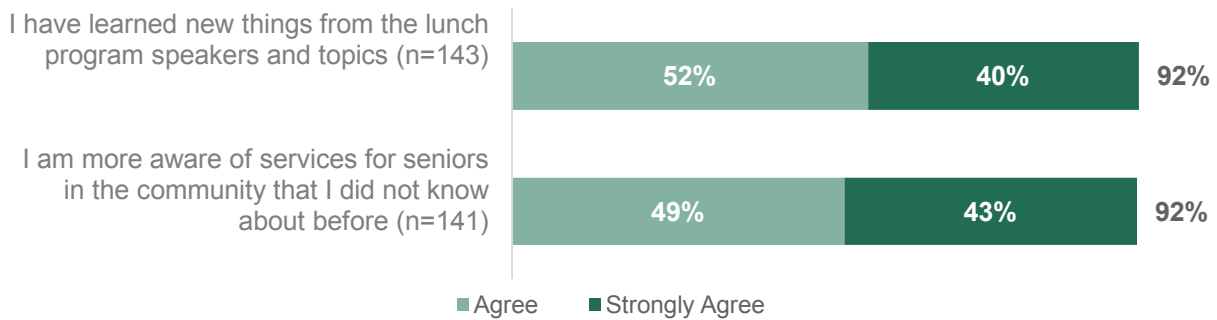
"The [lunch] program is fun, it lightens up my day, and is a lighter point in the day."

"All these people are lost because when you get to a certain age, your grandkids forget about you, your kids forget about you, and your semi-isolated here. But these are real people with real very interesting exciting lives. And unless somebody talks to them and asks them about it, that valuable gift they have is lost."

Increased Awareness of Senior Services

As can be seen in Figure 17, seniors indicated a greater awareness of services in the community since participating in NCSC. More than nine out of ten survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are more aware of services for seniors in the community (92%) and learned new information from the presentations (92%).

Figure 17. Awareness of Senior Services



Observations and findings from focus groups and interviews also verified seniors' increased awareness of services. Many seniors noted that while their primary motivations to attend NCSC were to socialize and eat lunch, they also learned a lot from the presentations and enjoyed them. They appreciated the wide range of topics presented to pique different interests of different seniors.

**Senior
Participants
2016**

"I was really surprised by the programs. Since I've started coming, I've learned so much. At first I thought to myself, 'oh great, a program, and I rolled my eyes.' But I loved it."

"The pharmaceutical person was very eye-opening [as to] how much of a price difference there is between retail stores and prescription costs."

**Senior
Participants
2017**

"The speakers have given me a lot of good information. I think I like the informational series the best."

[The presentations] have all been helpful... [I] didn't realize what is actually offered to us as seniors free of charge."

"I referenced some of the materials from one of the lunch presentations at a recent homeowners' meeting we were having here."

"Some of the speakers are really good and you get an idea of what the different types of services are in the area which I never thought about or considered."

In addition to reporting an increased awareness of services in the community, some seniors said they subsequently participated in some of the services offered by the speakers (e.g., library, yoga, dance and exercise classes, ukelele group) and/or shared the information with others.

**Senior
Participants
2016**

"I attended my first concert at the Vista Library after they came to lunch."

"I share the information with people at the church who don't come to lunch."

"I passed information to someone on gambling, the food bank, and the program to reduce your electric bill."

**Senior
Participants
2017**

"I used a craftsman who helped me replace a broken step in my house at no charge."

"I got some [home services] offered for free...I had grab bars installed in both bathrooms."

OTHER FINDINGS

In addition to the program’s impact on senior nutrition, socialization, quality of life, and awareness of services, seniors also spoke frequently about additional NCSC benefits and impacts that are worth noting. These include: 1) volunteering; 2) the variety, quality, and affordability of lunch; 3) the importance of the staff; and 4) the opportunity to get out of their homes.

Value of Volunteering

Research shows that seniors who volunteer may reduce their risk of health problems, including depression.²³ Senior volunteers are a core element of NCSC, assisting with critical programmatic tasks such as greeting senior guests, taking orders, distributing lunch trays and more. Based on focus groups and interviews, NCSC volunteers expressed the benefits gained from being of service to others.

**Senior
Volunteers
2016**

“I was stuck in routine and very isolated until started volunteering.”

“Volunteering gives me responsibility and discipline. I know I have something to do every Friday, have a reason to wake up in the morning. Can’t sleep in, stay on the computer.”

“I retired and got sick and volunteering has helped me get to know a lot of people.”

“[Volunteering has improved] my mental health. It keeps my endorphins flowing. I enjoy giving [and] receive so much from the program.”

**Senior
Volunteers
2017**

“Volunteering has given me a good feeling.”

“It’s great to volunteer and help people.”

“As a volunteer, I have met many more people than before.”

**Staff
2017**

“I think that the biggest changes that I’ve seen are in some of the volunteers that come and help us out with each lunch every week. I think that some of those folks were very introverted and stay-at-homes and not socializing. This gives them the opportunity to come in and lend a hand and get to know their fellow residents... I’ve seen a lot of changes in the volunteers themselves. They seem to have been pretty introverted, in my mind, prior to starting to help out.”

²³ <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/participating-activities-you-enjoy>

Variety, Quality, and Affordability of Lunch

Many donation-based senior nutrition programs provide seniors with a healthy meal, but often these meals are prepared offsite in bulk and seniors have no choice as to what they eat. NCSC, on the other hand, offers seniors a freshly prepared meal from a menu and weekly specials that rotate every three months for just \$2. These differences did not go unnoticed by seniors, who expressed positive feedback around the menu options, food taste and affordability of lunch.

Senior Participants 2016

"The food is excellent. Choices are varied. I like the weekly special."

"I couldn't get any cheaper [or] any better. It is so convenient."

"I like the quality and the variety."

"Everything is fresh and so delicious."

Senior Participants 2017

"Affordable!!!"

"Good food for a low price."

"The price is right. You can't even get a cup of coffee at Denny's for \$2."

"It is a good tasting, cheap lunch. I like to eat, and it's cheap. Besides McDonald's, I can't go outside from here and get a two-dollar lunch."

"I don't have to make my own meals. Lunch is very good and the prices are right."

"[We] can get an inexpensive nutritious meal and they have a menu of 6+ items!"

Staff 2017

"We are not a typical food truck. We have weekly specials that rotate every three months. Seniors get to look forward to what the special of the week is. They get to try a variety of food. They get the normal food truck stuff, but they also get stroganoff, spaghetti or chicken teriyaki, or Hawaiian burgers. Because we rotate the specials every three months, they can establish favorites of the specials. It brings that experience of that joy when one of their favorites come back."

Importance of Staff

It takes qualified, committed and caring staff to operate any program effectively, including NCSC. Several seniors also noted the important role that the lunch staff played in helping to make lunch an enjoyable experience.

**Senior
Participants
2016**

“Thank you for all of your hard work. I enjoyed the lunch so much.”

“My friends are very happy with the wonderful service.”

“Thank you, staff for all you do!”

**Senior
Participants
2017**

“Dave (ICS staff) has made a big impact here – fantastic!”

“The volunteer, staff, [and] workers are exceptional. Friendly, know their job and very efficient.”

“I can’t say enough nice things about Dave and Donna (ICS staff).”

“The people who have been selected to work here have a kindness in their heart.”

In interviewing ICS and DfC staff, it also became clear that they take their role seriously and have a heart for their work. This can also be seen through a recent interview with Donna (ICS staff) in the San Diego Union Tribune (see Appendix E).

**Staff
2017**

“The seniors are my favorite part of the program. I know practically everyone who attends on a regular basis by name.”

“I enjoy looking forward to the seniors coming. I try to create a real welcoming environment, and call them by name. I tend to kid them as friends do to each other, making it a friendly environment.”

Opportunity to Get Out of Their Home

For many seniors, the lunch program offers an opportunity to leave their home when they otherwise might stay home and be isolated. They often described it as their weekly outing and spoke of looking forward to it each week.

**Senior
Participants
2016**

“I look forward to getting out each week. Even if it’s raining, it makes me even more excited.”

“Lunch is in my routine and I look forward to it and wait for it every day.”

“It makes me come out of my home.”

**Senior
Participants
2017**

“[The lunch program] gets me out of the house and less isolated.”

“I come out of the house [for the lunch program]. Otherwise I might sit home.”

“[I enjoy] having a specific place to go on Mondays. I look forward to lunch.”

**Staff
2017**

“There have been times when we’ve had to cancel suddenly and I’m sure that that is disappointing...not just from a logistical standpoint of ‘What am I going to do for lunch?’ but the whole experience... the whole event is gone for them for that day, and actually for that whole week...”

SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS



Helena Jett

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
North County Senior Connections Lunch Site

"[At lunch] are people who come from every walk of life – some have a lot of money, some don't... and yet we all gather in the same area to talk, to communicate, because we are all human beings, and that's how all these people look at each other. They don't look at you with a dollar sign, they don't try to judge your behavior... they don't ask questions about the past, future – it's now. We're here now."

Has been coming to the senior lunch program for... About two years.

Started coming to lunch because...

Donna (ICS staff) encouraged her to attend. She was going through some personal hardships at the time and Donna helped her to realize that she needed to socialize with others. Donna also helped her to realize she could benefit from helping people and invited her to volunteer. She enjoyed it right away! *"If it had never been for Donna, I would never have gone [to lunch]."*

Credits the senior lunch program for improving...

Her overall health. Through her participation in the lunch program, and thanks to support from the ICS staff, in September 2016 Helena realized her weight and overall health were suffering and she needed to make a change. Over the following nine months, Helena lost 72 pounds and was able to cease taking all of her anti-depressant and pain medications. During this transformation, coming to NCSC became a regular part of her routine for a healthier lifestyle. Continuing to volunteer every Wednesday at St. Francis, Helena greets seniors with a smile as they arrive and as she walks around lending a helping hand wherever it's needed. *"It's a habit now."*

Her favorite part about the lunch program is...

The socialization. She loves meeting people and helping out at lunch. *"I feel like I'm needed – that's important. I feel like I'm contributing to society in a very good way because I make people happy for maybe an hour or two hours they're happy... and that's fun."*

If she was no longer able to attend the lunch program, the thing she would miss most would be...

The people – staff and other senior participants. *"Its the friendly hello, nice to see you, you look good! I actually look forward to [coming to lunch]... I look forward to meeting the same faces. It's like a family."*

If she was to describe the lunch program in one word it would be... Fantastic



Bob Maxwell (and wife Marge)
Palomar Estates East Mobile Home Park
North County Senior Connections Lunch Site

“The [lunch] program makes you feel like you’re still part of the world.”

It is a real lifesaver for me, for most elderly people. You spend most of your life socializing. Then you retire and there’s nothing to do. This program fills in some of the spots.”

Has been coming to the senior lunch program for... About a year, almost every week.

Started coming to lunch because...

A neighbor told him about it and a lot of their friends come. Since then, it’s become part of the social network for him and his wife of 55 years. His wife has dementia, and the lunch program gets her out and gets people talking to her. They have a small group that he calls a social support group for both him and his wife. *“You get a lot of support with the people you sit and eat with.”*

If he was no longer able to attend the lunch program, the thing he would miss most would be...

The social aspect of the program, sense of community. *“We never really developed a sense in a community because we moved every 2-3 years due to work. In other communities, I don’t think I knew 3 people. Because of the lunch program, I know way more people, and my dog knows even more people than I do.”*

His favorite part about the lunch program is...

The social aspect of the program and, the food and the price! *“It is a good lunch! First of all, you get lunch for two bucks! You get to know what every sandwich is like. Everybody has different tastes. I use the To Go meal for both of us. It’s one day I don’t have to cook.”* Because of his wife’s dementia, her tastes change daily. So it’s helpful to have multiple things on the menu so there is choice and they don’t have to eat the same thing every time.

Credits the senior lunch program for...

Connecting him with resources in the community that help him as the sole caretaker for his wife with dementia. Because of presentations during lunch, Bob learned about a respite care program that provides temporary rest from caregiving. *“This coming week the Alzheimer’s Association of San Diego is coming to give me a break because I can’t even go to the drugstore without my wife. Coming here you talk to people who have worked with these programs and technology.”*

If he was to describe the lunch program in one word it would be... Wonderful

Update:

Bob’s wife, Marge, passed away several weeks following this interview. During an interview with ICS staff member, he/she noted *“even though [Bob’s] wife passed away, he’s still coming to the lunch. And he’s now sitting with other people. I think this program has made such a difference. I don’t think if he hadn’t been coming to the lunches that he would have been able to cope with her passing as well as he’s doing right now. The socialization is pretty incredible for a lot of these seniors.”*

CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented from this three-year evaluation demonstrate that NCSC is a beloved and valued program making a positive impact in the lives of the seniors it serves. Survey, interview, and focus group data show that NCSC is meeting its goals of improving nutrition, increasing socialization, improving quality of life, and increasing awareness of senior services. Furthermore, feedback from senior participants emphasized additional impacts and important program elements such as: volunteering; variety, quality, and affordability of lunch; importance of staff; and the opportunity to get out of their homes.

Taken together, these findings prompt the Caster Center to recommend this program be continued, as NCSC is meeting critical needs of seniors in North County by providing them with a unique opportunity to consistently experience “food, friendship and health.”

The success of this program can, in part, be attributed to its unique design and collaborative approach that addresses a variety of senior needs. With a growing senior population and no other program in the community quite like it, the consequences of not continuing could create a large gap of unmet needs in the senior community.

One senior who has attended lunch at several NCSC sites shared her perspective on the unique value of NCSC. Having traveled to senior centers in Encinitas, Carlsbad, Vista, and Oceanside for lunch before discovering NCSC, she shared the following:

“[At another senior center] they assigned you a seat and you have to call in advance the day before if you want a meal. Here [at NCSC], if you can’t make [lunch] for some reason, its ok. [The other senior centers] don’t provide entertainment or informational programs every day...here we have something everyday and people learn a lot here. The people that work here are really caring, wonderful people. I probably socialize more because I come [to the NCSC lunch program]. Senior centers should be that way. I really think [NCSC] is a really, really worthwhile program.”

Seniors themselves expressed how much they appreciate the program, and when asked what they would miss most if the program went away, they spoke about many aspects of what makes the program special.

**Senior
Participants
2017**

- “I would miss the food and the company.”*
- “I would miss the people.”*
- “I would miss the comradery and the fun...that’s what I feel is missing in so many of our lives. As we get older we get shut-in.”*
- “I would miss companionship the most.”*
- “I would miss the social aspect of the program.”*

In addition to recommending that the program continue, the Caster Center also recommends that NCSC continue to engage in program evaluation. Specifically, staff and funders should

consider the importance of accurate and reliable data collection and reporting, as well as invest in and focus on capturing more impact data. With those priorities in mind, Caster Center recommends the following:

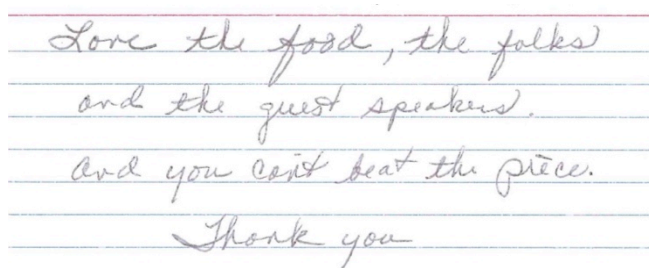
- ICS and DfC continue their respective data collection and aggregate data into one system. Continue to report metrics (e.g., meals served, client participation, etc.), as well as overall outcomes and impact on a regular basis. This will help inform program-related decisions and hopefully secure more funding.
- Schedule regular time to review data collection systems, ensure data accuracy (e.g., clean duplicates, errors), and identify and implement necessary changes.
- Use the logic model to design and distribute a survey to more senior participants to: 1) better understand how NCSC is impacting their lives; 2) track findings over time; 3) modify the program as necessary; and 4) amplify evidence for current and prospective funders.

Also, drawing on findings from the evaluation report and additional feedback from seniors and NCSC staff, the Caster Center recommends NCSC partner organizations revisit setting new program goals for targeted number of meals served, senior attendance, and program growth. It may also be helpful to further clarify the demographic of seniors to be served through NCSC. For example, questions have been raised about the potential need for a lunch site in other North County cities (e.g., Escondido) and whether NCSC is intended to serve low-income seniors or low to moderate-income seniors.

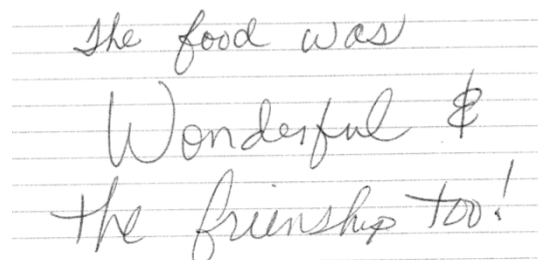
Finally, the Caster Center recommends NCSC partner organizations continue to seek opportunities to tell the NCSC story. This is an innovative program with demonstrated effectiveness that could serve as a model for other senior nutrition programs in San Diego County and beyond. Recommendations in this area include:

- Identify marketing and promotional opportunities to heighten awareness of the program and strengthen the brand of NCSC.
- Utilize existing data and document best practices that can serve as a resource for other programs attempting similar outcomes.

Through research, collaboration, continuous improvement and a genuine care for the well-being of seniors, the organizations that represent NCSC have created a program that is uniquely and positively impacting the life of North County seniors every day. Below are two comment cards from seniors that express the overall sentiment of senior participants.

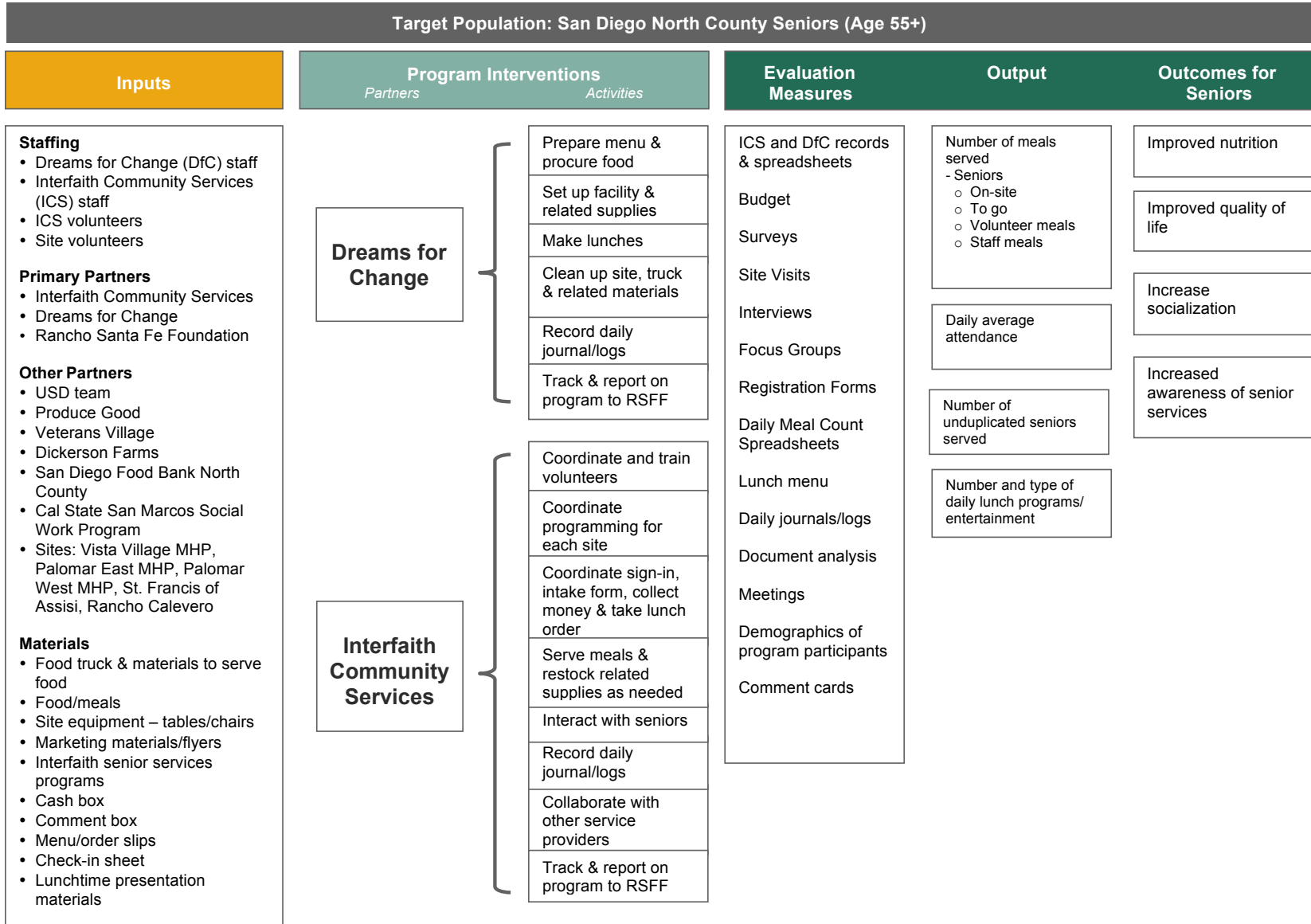


Love the food, the folks
and the great speakers.
and you can't beat the price.
Thank you

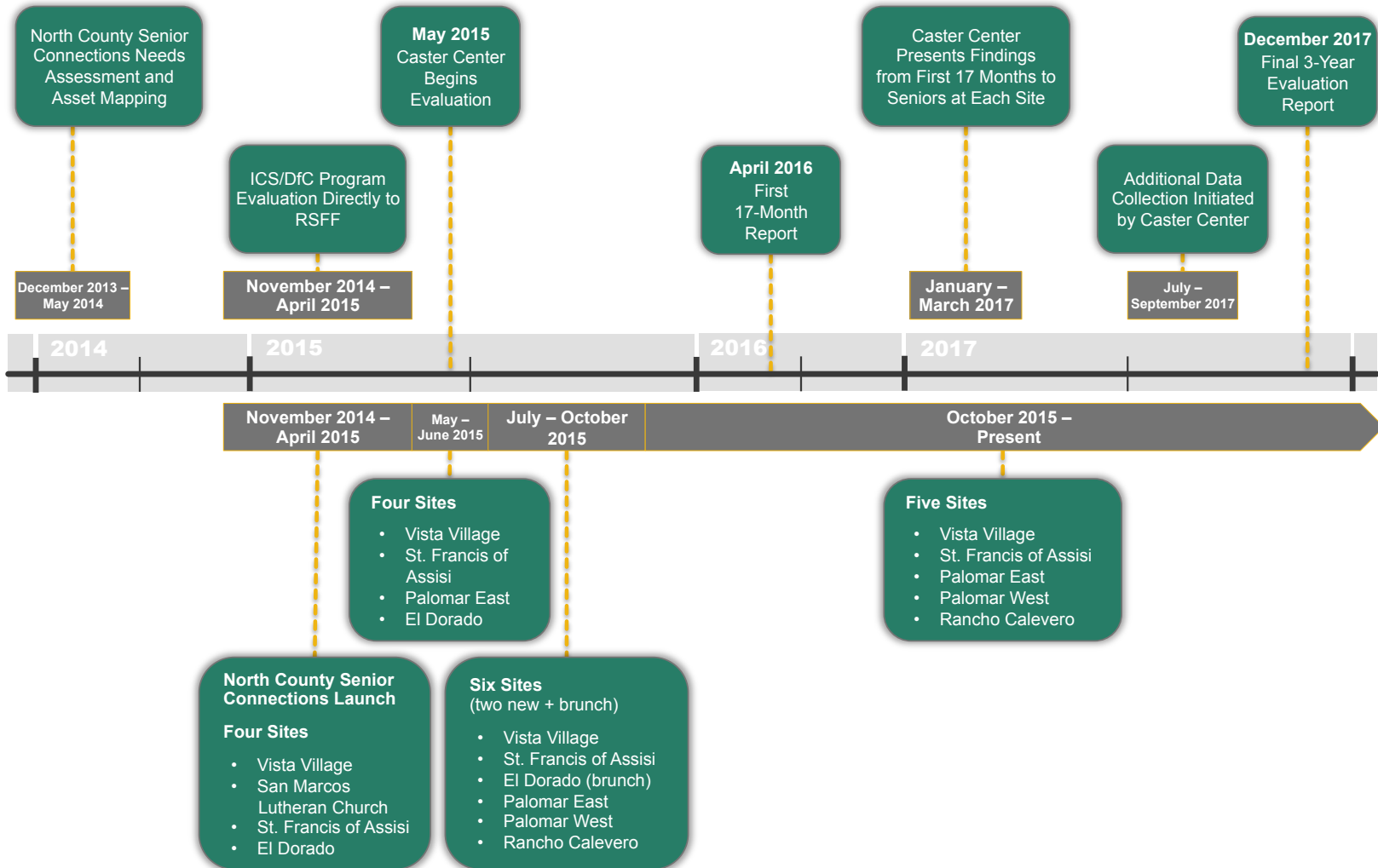


The food was
Wonderful &
the friendship too!

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL



APPENDIX B: PROGRAM AND EVALUATION TIMELINE



Notes:

At the November 2014 launch, NCSC was operating at four sites. It expanded to five sites in October 2015. For several months, there were six sites, including brunch on Wednesdays at the El Dorado Mobile Home Park, but this was discontinued in October 2015 because of low attendance. In September 2015, fresh produce distribution began.

APPENDIX C: 17-MONTH INFOGRAPHIC

North County Senior Connections

Thyme Together Food Truck Lunch Program: Evaluation Findings







Established: November 2014

Goal: Provide affordable, nutritious lunches, recreational programs, and community information to seniors in North County






A Collaboration of:



The Numbers (from Nov 2014 through Sept 2016)

	Number of Meals Served	16,398		Number of Unique Presentations	210
	Number of Seniors Served	1,463		Average Daily Attendance	37

The Impact

	Nutrition	64% said they ate more nutritious meals since attending the program
	Socialization	90% said they had more opportunities for socialization
	Quality of Life	92% said the program had a positive effect on their life
	Awareness of Services	92% became more aware of services for seniors in the community
	Satisfaction	97% agreed that they were satisfied with the program and would recommend it to a friend

In Your Words

“I met so many friends and people through this program. We opened communications more in-depth rather than superficial.”

“I was a recluse and very unhappy and lonely [before coming to this program.] Now I feel very alive, interested in people who are so pleasant.”



“If I ate at home, it wouldn’t be as nutritional. It would be out of a can.”

“Volunteering has improved my mental health. It keeps my endorphins flowing.”

“The volunteers are very dedicated and committed.”

Recommendations & Results

Data Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented a new program to track attendance and participation
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hired a Senior Outreach Specialist to support overall program, including scheduling and following up with speakers Added staff to the truck
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed volunteer protocol, including job descriptions and training Held first volunteer meeting at each site with plan for biannual meetings Increased recruitment of new volunteers
Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed Presentation Guide for presenters Implemented a new Resident Speaker series for attendees who also want to be presenters Scheduled more diverse and entertaining presentations
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with each park manager to promote lunch Designed new location-specific outreach flyers Promoted in new resident welcome packets and St. Francis bulletin Made many presentations in the community
Food & Truck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gave presentations about food, menu and nutrition Implemented triplicate ordering form to reduce errors and improve tracking Continue to improve menu and ordering system

Senior feedback quotes and recommendations came from focus groups with Seniors and volunteers at all five sites between January-March 2016

APPENDIX D: SENIOR SURVEY



North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* Lunch Program Evaluation

Researchers from the University of San Diego are helping the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation evaluate the North County Senior Connections *Thyme Together* food truck program, intended to provide “food, friendship, and health” to seniors in North County San Diego.

Your feedback is important to help us improve the program. You will not be asked to provide your name or any identifying information and your responses will be combined with other responses and reported in aggregate.

Please check box to indicate that you have read and understand why you are being asked to complete this survey.

Today’s Date: _____

Home Zip Code: _____

Year of Birth: _____

Gender: Male Female

Do you live alone? Yes No

Program site: Vista Village (M) Palomar East (T) St. Francis (W-lunch)
 Palomar West (TH) Rancho Calevero (F)

How often do you attend the Thyme Together lunch program?

Every week 2-3 times a month Once a month Less than once a month This is my first time

When did you first start coming to the Thyme Together lunch program?

January-March, 2015 October-December, 2015
 April-June, 2015 January-March, 2016
 July-September, 2015 Can’t remember

Please rate the quality of the following services by using the scale below and check the box that applies.

Services	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Very good	5 Excellent
Quality of food					
Variety of food					
Helpfulness of staff and volunteers					
Quality of programs and speakers					
Accessibility of lunch location					

Please turn over to complete back page

Please think about your life since you started attending in the Thyme Together senior lunch program. Check the box that matches your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

Since I started attending the Thyme Together senior lunch program...	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
I see friends more often					
I have made new friends					
I think about ways to take better care of my health					
I eat meals that are more nutritious for me					
I feel happier with my life					
I have had more opportunities for socialization					
I have something to look forward to each week					
I have become aware of services available for seniors in the community that I did not know about before					
I feel that the lunch program has a positive effect on my life					
I have learned new things from the lunch program speakers and topics					
I would recommend the lunch program to a friend or family member					
I feel more connected to my community					
Overall I am satisfied with the program					

Please write any additional comments you have about the Thyme Together lunch program?

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey!

APPENDIX E: NCSC MEDIA COVERAGE

Connecting seniors to resources and new friends



Donna Stinson (Hayne Palmour IV / San Diego Union-Tribune)
September 17, 2017

Lisa Deaderick **Contact Reporter**

Seniors in North County have been able to access to affordable food and nutrition resources, and get a chance to socialize because of the North County Senior Connections pilot program. As project coordinator of the program, Donna Stinson gets a chance to spend more time with seniors and hearing about their lives, which is something she loves.

“In the '90s, I worked in a retirement home in [Carlsbad](#) as a cook. While there, I had a lot of interaction with seniors and loved it. Hearing their life stories was not only interesting to me, I was in awe of how much they had lived through,” she says. “I recall one senior who had come to California with her parents in a covered wagon. So when the opportunity to work with seniors again came up, I was very excited to be able to meet and hear more stories from seniors.”

The program is a partnership between Interfaith Community Services and Dreams for Change — funded by the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation — to provide low-cost lunches at the clubhouses of senior mobile home parks and a church in San Marcos, Vista and Oceanside. There are also community resources, speakers and an opportunity to interact with peers.

Stinson, 64, lives in [Valley Center](#) with her husband and took some time to talk about the goals for the program, her own personal experience with seniors through caring for her parents, and the desire to expand the program to other locations.

Q: Tell us about North County Senior Connections and how it works.

A: Senior Connections is a lunch program provided by Interfaith Community Services and Dreams for Change. The purpose is to provide low-cost lunches, community resources and educational speakers to seniors in North County, and it’s marketed to seniors through senior centers, local churches and senior mobile home parks. Once the seniors attend the lunch, they are asked to complete our registration form. Their first lunch is free. Anyone 55 or older pays \$2 per meal, and anyone under 55 pays \$4 per meal. No proof of income is required.

Q: You have personal experience in caring for seniors by having been a caregiver for your parents. What kind of insight did that experience give you with regard to your work with this program?

A: After being a caregiver to my parents for three years, I have a real understanding of the struggles seniors face every day. My mom has Alzheimer's disease and type 2 diabetes and my dad had a seizure disorder, heart trouble, post-traumatic stress disorder from World War II and his time on Iwo Jima, and a stroke, to name just a few of their illnesses. The insight that experience gave me was that it is no easy task growing old. The one thing they really enjoyed, which we did every day for the three years that they were with me, was to go out for lunch. We always went to a local, family-friendly restaurant. My dad passed away almost four years ago and was the second to the last sibling out of 13 to pass. My mom is 89 and the last of nine children in her family, and now lives in New Hampshire with my two older sisters. That experience showed me how important it is for seniors to get out of the house and socialize. It was the highlight of my parent's day to go out for lunch.

Q: There are currently five specific goals for the program?

A: The first is to create a welcoming environment so seniors look forward to attending each week; then to create a social environment so seniors can meet new people and see existing friends; feed seniors a cost-effective and nutritious lunch for \$2 per meal that includes an entree, a side dish, and dessert; keep their minds engaged by providing resources on topics of interest for seniors; and finally, to get seniors out of isolating themselves at home.

What I love about Valley Center...

I love that I live out in the country where everything slows down to a crawl. Valley Center closes down by about sundown in my neighborhood. You can hear a pin drop, and I can hear myself think. Yet, I still have access to the goods and services that I need. I love that there are no street lights.

Q: How do you create a welcoming environment for the seniors you're serving?

A: It starts with seeing their neighbors volunteering and welcoming them into the lunch. I am also at each lunch site to welcome them. Most of the seniors that attend are there every week and I know nearly all of them by name. Much like the old TV series "Cheers," the seniors like to go where somebody knows their name. They love to talk about their life stories.

Q: What kinds of topics are presented to the seniors during these lunches?

A: We've had entertainment like a ukulele band with Hawaiian dancers, and representatives from the American Heart Association, San Diego County's Aging and Independent Services, San Diego County Sheriff's Department, San Diego Oasis, San Diego Center for the Blind, food banks and suicide prevention programs, just to name a few.

Q: Why is it important to get seniors away from being isolated in their homes?

A: It's important to get them socializing with other people to keep depression from setting in and to keep their minds engaged to help prevent memory loss. Getting them out of the house tends to get them more involved in their communities. Coming to the lunches has so many health benefits for them. The presentations we offer at each lunch give them access to other community resources they did not know was available to them.

Q: What's been the response from seniors and their families to the Senior Connections program?

A: They love it. They sometimes bring their visiting family members to the lunch and the numbers at one of our sites has grown from 35 to 55 just in the last year.

Q: What's been challenging about your work with the program?

A: We have more requests for other locations than we can currently accommodate. And sustaining funding.

Q: What's been rewarding about it?

A: Seeing the seniors come alive, and them meeting and engaging with new friends. Also hearing the seniors' stories of how they used the resources presented by the speakers at each lunch, and their stories of weight loss, better nutrition and all of the chatter during the lunches.

Q: What has it taught you about yourself?

A: It has taught me that I am a patient person, to listen better, and how much seniors have to offer society as a whole. I've learned that I enjoy the company of seniors, and that they all have an incredible sense of humor and sense of pride.

Q: What is the best advice you've ever received?

A: To lean on my faith for answers because I can ask a million people for answers and receive a million different responses. When I lean on my faith, the right answers always come to me.

Q: What is one thing people would be surprised about you?

A: That I am a classic rock 'n' roll fan.

Q: Describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

A: On a sailboat with my husband.