



Sunnyside Residents' Food Future is Bright and Local

The 3P Mentorship Program cultivates champions in public institutions who use their buying power to be leaders in sustainable food purchasing. Sunnyside built on staff, resident and community enthusiasm to realize a cost-neutral 13% increase in their local food procurement during the ten-month program. **FEBRUARY 2015**



Barbara Collins R.D. (who is celebrating many wins at Sunnyside this year and) says getting local food starts with asking for it.

Food and Environmental Services Manager Barbara Collins grew up in a rural area in southwestern Ontario and appreciates the value of supporting local food producers. She believes it is a way to contribute to the overall wellbeing of the Sunnyside Community. "I see it as the responsibility of a publicly funded institution such as Sunnyside to spend taxpayers' money wisely. **Local food is part of our strategy to provide the Sunnyside community with healthy, fresh food. But our budget is tight, so we had to make sure this local food project did not make a big impact on our budget.**" Over the course of the program, Barbara and her team have done just that. In just ten months, they established their baseline level of local food purchasing, set goals to engage their community in their project, and increased their total spending on local food by twelve percent. "Resident, staff and community satisfaction has increased," says Barb. "We get more positive feedback when more fresh, in-house prepared foods are on the menu."

It came as a pleasant surprise to Barbara how easy it was to switch to local in many cases. "Dairy products, for example, are easy to source locally. I learned that you just have to ask for local foods. And buying local

does not mean spending more. **Sunnyside has been able to double its local food purchases without affecting its budget.** Local producers know they have to be competitive too."

Sunnyside's local food wins came from sourcing local product both within and outside their contracted agreement with Sysco. "Most ordering systems are not currently set up to make it easy to source local food. However large purchasers, whether it's Sunnyside or other public institutions, can help to bring about change by asking for this information when it is not readily available. Overall, smaller



A resident is tickled pink at the June strawberry social.

Region of **Waterloo**, Long Term Care Home, in Kitchener, doing cooking on site using in-house recipes and buying some prepared items

3P Cohort Member:

Barbara Collins R.D.

Food and Environmental Services Manager

263 residents with physical and/or mental health or end-of-life conditions

Approximately **1,000** meals served per day across 10 dining rooms, a café, and community programs

\$1.5 million annual food budget

Kale (delicious in a salad) and **honey crisp apples** are Barbara's favourite Ontario foods

12% of last year's food purchases were local

25% of this year's food purchases are local

13% increase in local food purchasing from baseline

\$0 extra spent to achieve this increase

100 staff engaged through the program



Barbara and her team celebrate the arrival of one of their first big deliveries of local food after the 3P program started.

suppliers seem to be more willing to adjust their systems to accommodate such requests for local food.”

This pattern in leadership from smaller suppliers has repeated itself across the 3P cohort. When Barbara started to ask her suppliers about local foods, **Deanco Meats**, a local supplier of protein, took the initiative to ask to review Sunnyside’s menu to identify where local substitutions could be made. “It’s really helpful when suppliers go out of their way to help us identify opportunities like that,” said Barb. **“Sometimes a supplier will just say, ‘Oh you’ll just end up paying more,’ but that’s not always the case. It’s important to ask.”** Sysco has also responded to the growing demand for more information about food origins, and has introduced a green pepper icon to indicate locally produced food.

Another priority for Barbara has been to raise the awareness and support for local food within her facility and across her community. The residents have always been excited about supporting fresh, local food. Some of Barb’s staff were hesitant at first, asking questions like, “What about winter, when there’s not as much local food around?” Through the support of the program, Sunnyside has made some strategic substitutions and had some quick wins shifting to local foods. Any hesitancy from staff quickly gave way to enthusiastic support. “Staff buy-in for this has

been key,” Barbara says. Staff initiative to order and integrate local food into the menu has been growing across the year. “Working with fresh, whole, local foods can sometimes mean more work, as anyone who has worked with turnip or rutabaga knows. But staff took it on willingly and came forward with suggestions for ways of incorporating more local foods into the menu.”

The 3P Program helped to surface staff’s interest in sustainable food systems and they initiated their own local food box program in partnership with Bailey’s Local Food. The local food box created an opportunity for staff to taste and experiment with seasonal foods.

Staff also went above the call of duty, supporting events like a June Strawberry Social, making sure residents got fresh asparagus in July, and serving up local squash at Thanksgiving. Staff also rallied for a local food celebration hosted on site, by serving up delicious local fare to community stakeholders who joined Sunnyside to share visions of more local food future.

“This program and our local food efforts have been a great success with the patients, who appreciated the fresh flavours of local food. There has been so much enthusiasm generated by the year’s activities, we’re growing our plans to go even more local in the coming year, including growing produce on-site with our community housing residents.”

LOCAL WINS!

Barbara made some specific changes to increase her local purchases this year:

- 1** From Sysco to Deanco Meats for local chicken breast, diced chicken, farmers sausage, and Oktoberfest sausage.
- 2** Switched within Sysco to Gay Lea for any dairy products, Butterball turkey, Egg Solutions omelets, Country Queen coleslaw, Bonduelle frozen vegetables and peeled potatoes, and Stanislaus tomatoes.
- 3** Introduced Bailey’s Local Food basket for staff.
- 4** Used Don’s Produce whenever Ontario produce was available and competitively priced.

“We were able to achieve all this thanks to a team effort,” say Barb, “including the 3P mentors, our staff, residents, community partners, and a particularly helpful dietetic intern from **Brescia College**, who helped to manage the extra workload of introducing this new local effort.” The biggest challenge for all four facilities in the 3P has been to track their procurement progress. “I do most of my tracking manually,” explains Barb. “Not all my suppliers are able to report local on my invoices – the ones who do save me a lot of time. Otherwise it can be a lot of work.” Her next project is ensuring their local features are well communicated throughout Sunnyside’s ten dining rooms.

Barbara has already taken opportunities to share what she’s learned. She is committed to mentoring others in finding success at their own facilities. “The added support of the mentors and networking opportunities brought by the 3P Mentorship Program has given a big boost to my efforts. Neither our budget nor Ontario’s short growing season has stopped us from building our local food program. I’m happy to help anyone else who wants to learn from what we’ve been able to do.”

With the momentum of the year’s events and successes and the sustained enthusiasm of staff and residents, the future for Sunnyside looks bright and local!

The 3P Mentorship Program is lead by Hayley Lapalme and Wendy Smith. To get involved in the community of sustainable food purchasers, check out the program at mentorship.mysustainablecanada.org, apply to be in the next cohort, or contact hayley@mysuscan.org.