

# Offering More Than Food with Coaching

March 2023

## What is the More Than Food framework?

The More Than Food framework is founded on the premise that it takes “more than food” to address food insecurity. The framework is an approach for food pantries to reimagine their operations, programming, and strategic direction. This approach includes offering a welcoming culture, healthy client choice, and connections to additional community resources, and for more intensive programming, offering a coaching program. What makes the framework unique is its emphasis on data collection and evaluation.

## More Than Food is Evidence-Based

The More Than Food framework has its history in the design and evaluation of the Freshplace food pantry in Hartford, Connecticut. Established in 2010, the Freshplace program was rigorously studied through a randomized control trial assessing a holistic intervention of client choice, coaching with motivational interviewing, referrals, and nutrition education. The [original pilot study](#), implemented from 2010 to 2012 found significant improvements in food security, self-sufficiency, self-efficacy and diet quality over 9 months. The model was replicated in pantries in greater Hartford, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and El Paso, Texas. Despite the diverse settings, [results were significant and consistent](#) with the original Freshplace results. The More Than Food framework continues to evolve, and additional food banks and pantries are interested in this innovative model.

## Coaching in Food Pantry Settings

When pantries want to take a deeper dive into connecting guests with community services, they can offer individualized coaching. Hiring a coach is an in-depth, effective way to address the underlying reasons of why individuals and families may be struggling with food insecurity. The goal is building long-term food security and financial wellbeing, so participants won't need to continue visiting the food pantry over time. Coaches work closely with guests over several months to set goals and provide follow-up support. The pantry continues to distribute food to a larger population of people while working intensively with a small group of people for coaching.

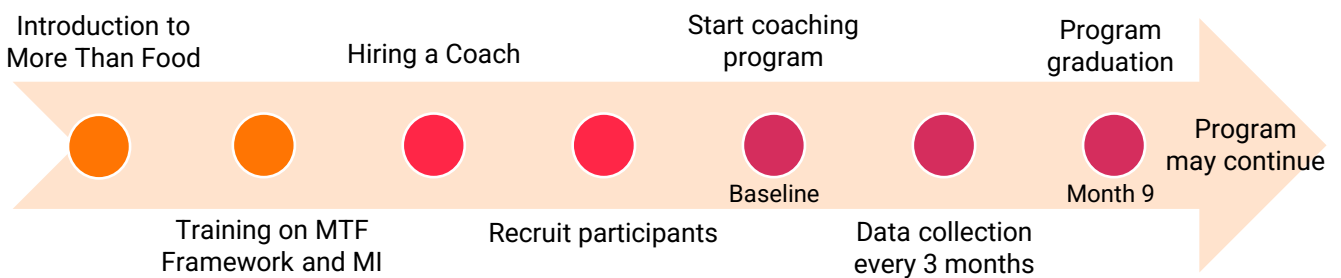


## Training for Coaches and Measuring Change

Coaches that are hired for coaching programs receive training from [More Than Food Consulting](#) and [Urban Alliance](#) on the Stages of Change theory and Motivational Interviewing, a strength-based set of techniques that coaches can use to encourage action towards goals. The coaches also receive training on how to collect survey data with coaching participants when they start the program and at 3-month intervals to measure changes over time. The main outcome metrics are:

- Food security (USDA Food Security model)
- Self-Efficacy (Generalized Self-Efficacy)
- Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support
- Financial Well-being (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau scale [CFPB])
- Self Sufficiency Scale (Missouri Community Action Family Self Sufficiency Scale)

## Timeline for Establishing a coaching program at a pantry



## Current Coaching Cohort

From 2021 to 2023, seven organizations have completed the More Than Food training program and are in various stages of hiring a coach, recruiting program participants, coaching participants, and collecting data. More Than Food Consulting aggregates the survey data from all sites to maximize results and continue to share learnings. With this current cohort, we've begun data collection with 18 participants. As each pantry is in a different phase of recruitment and coaching, we will continue to add data over time. Below we show the basic demographics of participants when they start the program.

## Fidelity with Flexibility

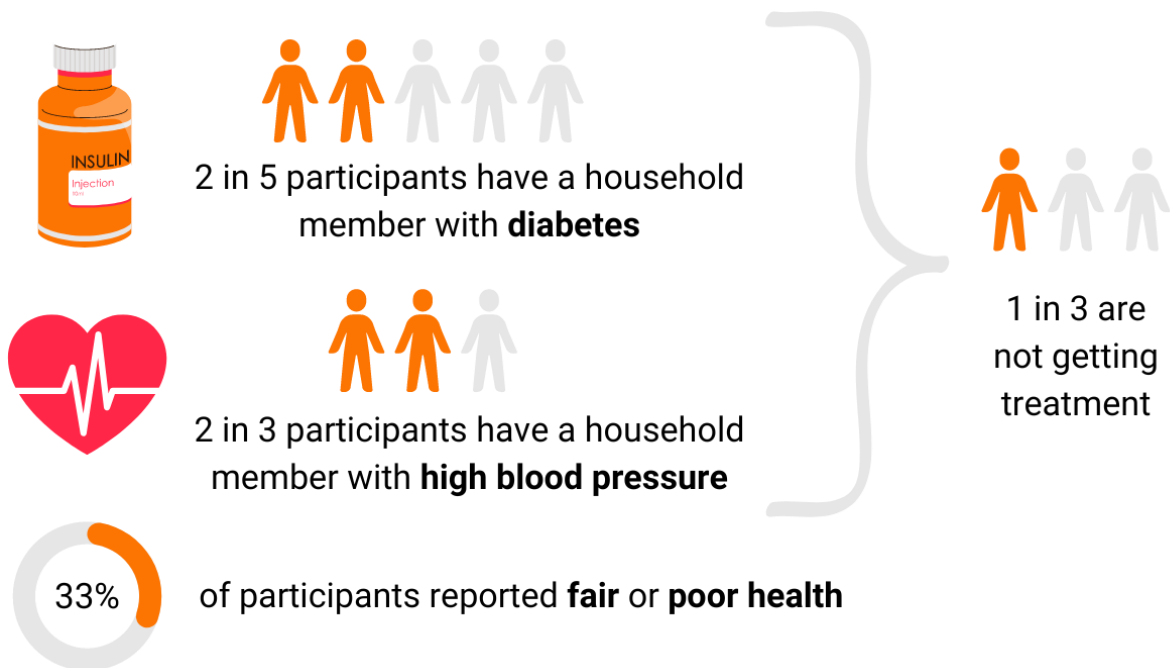
*Pantries that offer the More Than Food Coaching program follow the same structure and use standard measures. Yet each program can be adapted to the unique environments as needed. Program names, from FreshStart to upLIFT, reflect the ways in which food pantries shape the program to the strengths and context of their community, while embracing approaches to make guests feel welcome and respected.*



## Demographics

Of those enrolled in the coaching programs across the cohort, participants live in households with an average of 3 people. The majority of respondents identify as white, single, and female. Less than half (44%) of respondents said they are currently receiving SNAP. Consistent with previous research, many households experience chronic health conditions of diabetes and high blood pressure. Among these households, several people said they were not currently taking medication to treat the problem.

Characteristics of Participants	Percentage
Have children under age 18	72%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
White	61%
Black	28%
Other	11%
Single / separated	72%
Female	72%
Receive SNAP/EBT/food stamps	44%
Receive Earned Income Tax Credit	45%
Diabetes in the household	39%
High blood pressure in the household	67%
Reported fair or poor health	33%
<i>Food Security</i>	
High food security	6%
Marginal food security	35%
Low food security	24%
Very low food security	35%



## Food Security

Regarding the main outcomes, over half of participants (59%) were classified as food insecure, including 35% who experienced very low food security where adults skip meals or reduce the size of their kids' meals. This highlights the importance of these holistic programs, and the benefit of co-locating coaching services at food pantries where basic needs can be met while participants work towards other goals to achieve self-sufficiency. As more participants complete the program, and for each outcome measure, we will be able to measure changes over time.

*"They genuinely care for the people and never made us feel uncomfortable. The support, guidance, and resources were so rewarding." – Program participant*

### Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a measure of a person’s confidence in their ability to make changes in their lives. Coaches use Motivational Interviewing and the Stages of Change theory to help improve guests’ sense of self-efficacy and their ability to set and reach goals. On a scale from 1 to 5, average self-efficacy scores at baseline were high at 4.

### Social Support

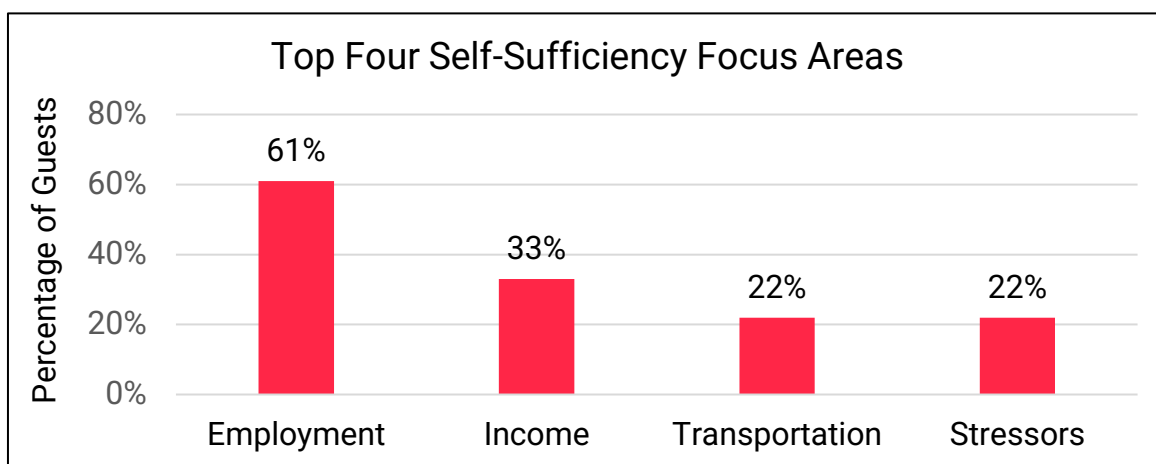
The Social Support questionnaire measures a person’s ability to rely on a social network, such as family, friends or a special person. Social supports are beneficial to achieving goals. At baseline, on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high), average scores of social support were 3.5.

### Self Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is measured using eleven scales that assess levels of education, academic skills, employment, income, physical health, mental health, housing, health insurance, childcare, transportation, and psychosocial stress. Each of the scales is scored from 1 (high priority/crisis) to 5 (low priority/stable). The goal of the coaching program is to address areas of high priority or crisis and increase the scores toward more stability.

*“The team helped us set goals that we could achieve.”*  
- Participant

The chart below shows the frequency of areas that were indicated as “High Priority” according to the baseline surveys. Employment was the leading area that would contribute to achieving self-sufficiency. Other key areas included income, transportation and support managing stressors in their lives. The coach can celebrate the areas that are low priority, and use motivational interviewing skills to suggest the high priority areas for the guest to work on and discuss at the next meeting.



### Financial Wellbeing

We use the CFPB scale to measure the extent to which someone’s financial situation and the financial capability that they have developed provide them with security and freedom of choice. The scale includes 10 questions for a total of 40 points, with higher scores reflecting more financial security. On a scale from 0 to 4, average financial wellbeing scores at baseline were low at 1.4.

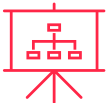
The sample size from this cohort is still small, but results from the baseline surveys mirror data from the previous research from Freshplace and More Than Food coaching programs.

## Coaching Support

Every other month, coaches and other key staff participate in peer-learning meetings hosted by More Than Food Consulting. Coaches share successes, challenges and other resources. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for this work, but through our peer learning sessions, we can compile learnings and improve the scalability of the coaching program.

*“Learning from past mistakes, the first thing I did was I told my organization, if we’re going to do this, we’re in this together.” - Dani, Community Hope Center*

## Key Facilitators:



**Organizational Buy-In:** It is essential for pantries to have organizational commitment for coaching across staff, volunteers, and board members. It creates alignment, improves engagement, fosters communication and collaboration, supports systems change, and ultimately leads to best results for program participants.



**Familiarity and Relationships with Local Community Services:** Building relationships with local community services helps ensure program participants are connected with the resources that best meet their needs and can help them achieve their goals.

*“Back in July, August, September, Andrea [the coach] started the process of laying the groundwork for the January launch and literally went door to door to resources that were in our community to get flyers and get to know people and get to know hand-offs for warm referrals” – Bryan, LCCM*

## Key Barriers:



**Recruitment:** It can be challenging to find participants who are ready to commit to a 9-month program, especially if they are used to visiting pantries for immediate food assistance. Strategies for recruitment include:

- messaging around the goals of the program, not focusing on the length
- offering incentives, such as shopping at the pantry after coaching sessions or gift cards after survey completion



**Staff Turnover:** Frequent turnover can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and experience which can make it difficult for coaching programs to maintain continuity and effectiveness. Programs may want to have several people go through training to ensure sustainability. Pantries that rely on volunteers or interns will need funding to hire a coach.



**Accurate Data Collection:** Coaching programs that work with More Than Food Consulting have the benefit of aggregated data with larger sample sizes than could be generated by a single food pantry. As the program evolves, we are creating more standardized tracking for data and standard operating procedures.

## Summary and Next Steps

Program length can span six months to one year, with an average or expected commitment of nine months. Participants will then “graduate” from the coaching program once they have made substantial progress with the two to three goals identified by the participants and coaches. Through bi-monthly peer learning sessions, coaches and staff will continue sharing better practices and learnings. As more participants graduate, we will continue evaluating the data to measure impact of these coaching programs on food security, self-efficacy, perceived social support, financial well-being and self-sufficiency.



*Graduation at Community Food Connection*

## Special Thanks to Our Partners:

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