



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

You might be aware that Denver's Spring Institute, known for its work on intercultural learning, is in the food access space. But thousands of residents who live in neighborhoods along the East Colfax corridor certainly do.

With the onslaught of the pandemic shutdowns, the institute quickly understood that issues of hunger and food access were quickly outpacing most other needs in the community. So they began working in the hunger relief space for the immigrants and refugees they serve.

"It was quickly obvious that many of the places people might traditionally get access to free food didn't always have the foods that refugees and immigrants need," said Brandy Kramer, the Institute's Senior Program Manager for Community-Based Integration Programs. "If you have 10 cans of Dinty Moore Stew in your house, and you are hallall, you really don't have food in your house."

After receiving Food Pantry Assistance Grants, the institute began working to fill the gaps these families were facing, particularly when it came to dietary staples that were unlikely to be found in mainstream American grocery stores and restaurants. In addition, they partnered first with the Tri-County Health Department and additionally with UC Health to support immigrant and refugee families with COVID in their homes as well.

The institute pumps the money they are receiving from the grant back into the community by focusing on partnerships with ethnic markets, local ethnic restaurants, small-scale butchers and delivery drivers, all serving the community already. Rather than try to do it all with limited resources, the institute supplements other food resources with hard-to-find items or preprepared restaurant meals for those who can't prepare their own food.

"These local businesses are already invested in getting the people what they traditionally and culturally eat and that they want to eat," Kramer said. "We're just helping that happen by making sure that everyone involved is compensated appropriately for the work they are doing. And that the gaps in resources are being filled."

Next up for the institute? Working with the local workforce, like a local man who was spending his own money and resources to drive to Greeley where a hallall butcher lives, to apply for the grants directly himself.

"Why shouldn't he be getting this support directly and have the food in his community for distribution directly?" she said. "This project has also allowed us to meet community members that are interested in the same idea of getting people the food they need. Why shouldn't they be receiving the support directly and doing the work?"