

Nourishing Mind and Body: Nutrition at Fountain House

By Amy Ferrara, Culinary Unit, and Joe Shaffer, Wellness Resource Area

Fountain House is one of the world's leading mental health organizations, providing employment, educational and housing opportunities to people living with serious mental illness.

Fountain House's Culinary Unit has made major strides in the past year to improve the quality and the nutritional content of the meals that we serve to our community. The days of selling soda, flipping burgers, and serving up greasy comfort foods are behind us. As the department responsible for providing our members with meals - for some, the only balanced meal they eat each day – staff and members of the Culinary Unit felt it was time to start using natural and healthy ingredients to make food that is nutritious and tastes delicious.

Every week the Fountain House community is invited to take part in our menu-planning meeting when we decide which meals to serve for the following week and determine whether they meet our nutritional guidelines. In addition to these meals, we offer a full salad bar every day, where members can choose from a variety of healthy, often organic, produce to compose their salads. At least one day per week we serve what we like to call a "wellness meal," which is an extra healthy meal that contains no animal products.

The Culinary Unit coordinates with members and staff from the Wellness Resource Area to put these meals together. The Wellness Resource Area creates a nutrition fact sheet each day for the food served, which allows our community to better understand the nutritional content of the food they consume and to make healthy eating choices. Members who seek additional support can attend a weekly nutrition group held in the Wellness Resource Area.

The Culinary Unit also partners with the Horticulture Unit to work on a sustainable foods project. This involves growing our own fruits and vegetables at High Point Farm and on the roof-top of a nearby residence. Our in-house hydroponic garden provides the Culinary Unit with much of the lettuce needed to sustain our salad bar year round. This year, our goal is to double the amount of fruits and veggies that we grew last year. Fountain House also has a relationship with a local farmer's market that provides us with their surplus fruits and vegetables during the spring, summer, and early fall. This project also aims to reduce our consumption of store-bought canned and frozen foods that contain high amounts of sodium and preservatives. This spring we are planning to start to can our own sauces, preserve our own fruits and vegetables, and squeeze our own juice.

With the help of the Horticulture Unit and the Wellness Resource Area, the Culinary Unit is providing tasty, nutritious meals for our community and helping our members and staff lead healthier lives.