A Matter of Choice

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By Gherell Owens

As a Member Engagement Specialist I visit programs every day that distribute food by handing out pantry bags. I encourage them to convert to client choice because it improves the distribution process and offers clients a more dignified experience.

This past winter, I visited **Give Them to Eat** in the Bronx and spoke with Program Director Rev. Danilo Lachapel and Program Coordinator Maria Vives. They nodded and agreed with me as I gave my spiel, but I still wasn't sure if they'd really make the switch. A few months later, during another visit, Rev. Lachapel asked me to give an impromptu sermon on client choice to the volunteers and clients gathered in the church sanctuary. I was nervous but I did it, and this time I had a feeling that a conversion just might happen. A proclamation that things were about to change for the better was made that day!

Two weeks after my big speech I returned to **Give Them to Eat** on a cold and blustery day. An equally chilly air of uncertainty still lingered as I set out to complete my objective. And the perfect opportunity was about to present itself. The program distributes an astounding amount of produce from its parking lot, and they had recently come up with the brilliant idea of splitting it into two aisles instead of one to speed up the process and cut wait times. I seized the moment and did the very

same thing as a way to introduce client choice to their pantry.

The volunteers and I headed inside and set up two rows of parallel tables, each side topped with the exact same pantry items. As clients entered to "shop" the tables, they ooohed and aaahed, amazed by the change. One after another commented on how much happier they were with the new setup. You could feel their sense of dignity--and that's what client choice is all about.

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