

VISTA recognized for service at national conference



I had the distinct pleasure of attending the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior's (SNEB) 49th annual conference in San Diego, California July 31st- August 2nd 2016. This nationally recognized organization "is dedicated to promoting effective nutrition education and healthy behavior through research, policy and practice and has a vision of healthy communities, food systems and behaviors." My mentor and previous professor at the University of Cincinnati, Seung-Yeon Lee, PhD is an active member of SNEB and introduced me to the scholarship opportunities that are offered to community members who are working in nutrition education. I applied under the work that I am doing with ShareCorps Ohio in partnership with the Freestore Foodbank of Cincinnati, Ohio where I serve as the Nutrition Education Program Specialist. The overall environment of the conference was welcoming and supportive and refueled my drive to incorporate social justice in all the work that I do.

SNEB selects the community scholarship awardees based on their vision for nutrition education in their communities and how conference attendance would be applied to help advance current nutrition programming. In my essay I conveyed my passion for service and how I want the work that I am doing to contribute to: increasing food security by facilitating relevant nutrition programming to the customers of the food pantry, increasing awareness of policies that directly affect access to nutrient dense affordable food, and ultimately empower low-income people to fight for the right to nutrient dense affordable foods in their neighborhoods. In returning from the conference I am more connected to how I can continue my commitment to the community and reach these goals through nutrition education.

There was so much information covered at the conference between the influential keynote speakers, SNEB Division meetings and student poster presentations! I was reminded how necessary interdisciplinary work is and witnessed the awesome programming that results from such collaborations. I was able to practice my "elevator speech" and connect with people from all over the world (20 countries and 48 states were represented between 733 attendees) who are working to improve the lives of others through nutrition.

I was inspired after hearing what an important role nutrition educators play in expanding the possibilities of accessible safe and nutritious food after the session “Global Food Systems: Solutions for the Growing World” that features three influential panelist. Andrew Jones, PhD from the University of Michigan’s Department of Nutritional Sciences gave an overview of food systems and how it impacts public health nutrition regionally and globally. Angie Mei of International Rescue Committee San Diego described the experience of working with refugees and the nutritional challenges this unique population faces once they are resettled. Rishi Kumar of The Growing Club based in San Gabriel Valley, Los Angeles talked about the direct impact of the built environment on a food system and the many ways urban farming can be used to enrich the Earth. Each speaker built upon the previous information and shared their approaches to address the challenges faced in the global food system.

I was encouraged to dream bigger after listening to the keynote speaker Dr. Christina Economos Associate Professor and the New Balance Chair in the Childhood Nutrition at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and Medical School at Tufts University. Dr. Economos spoke of the success she and her team had with Shape Up Somerville through Community Based Participatory Research approach to nutrition education in Massachusetts. This initiative was included as a model program in the First Lady Michelle Obama initiated “Let’s Move” Campaign and is still in effect today! This session particularly resonated with me as it gave me an example of the possibilities that lie within combining community centered research and empowerment with a social justice focus.

I am very excited to take what I have learned at the SNEB conference and apply it to my third term of service with AmeriCorps. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Lee for being a great mentor, SNEB, AmeriCorps, ShareCorps Ohio for upholding missions and visions that ultimately improve the world, Max Finberg, Director of AmeriCorps VISTA, for encouraging me to write this blog and of course The Freestore Foodbank for contributing greatly to my development as a VISTA member.

Links to Learn more:

ShareCorps Ohio/ Ohio Association of Foodbanks: <http://ohiofoodbanks.org/>

Freestore Foodbank: <http://freestorefoodbank.org/>

SNEB: <https://www.sneb.org/blog/>