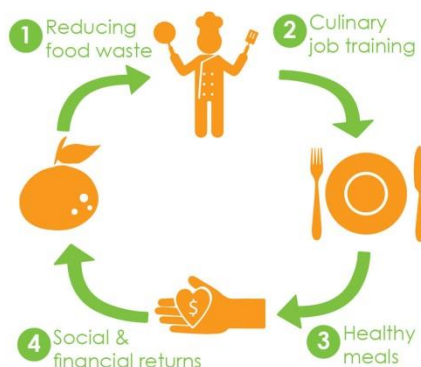


Kitchens for Good: Cooking up change in San Diego

Making a difference

Kitchens for Good (KFG) creates opportunity in San Diego with innovative programs in workforce training, healthy food production, and social enterprise. Troubled by widespread food waste, KFG founder and former restaurateur Chuck Samuelson assembled a talented and dedicated team that has created a market for cosmetically imperfect but perfectly good groceries while addressing food insecurity in the community. While KFG had a site, it lacked the equipment to operate at a scale that would meet community needs.

A \$50,000 FreshWorks Fund grant allowed KFG to purchase critical equipment for the commercial kitchen and improve cold-storage capacity. This investment meant KFG could begin meal production, offer programs, and increase growth and sustainability. KFG now operates four interconnected programs: Project Reclaim, Project Kitchen, Project Launch, and Project Nourish.



Project Reclaim creates frozen meals and shelf-stable products from cosmetically imperfect and close-to-expiration food -- donated or purchased from food pantries, local farmers and wholesalers -- generating a revenue stream that supports KFG's other programs while providing economic benefits to the farmers and wholesalers.

Project Kitchen provides event catering, meal services for senior centers, and produces value-added retail products like pasta sauces, pickled vegetables, and jams, creating another revenue stream. This program is expected to grow substantially as the operation scales rapidly in the summer of 2016.

Project Launch is a culinary training and life skills program for at-risk community members such as the formerly incarcerated, recovering addicts, and youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Based on the "community kitchen" curricula pioneered by Robert Egger, the 13-week program "combines knife skills with life skills" to prepare students for restaurant jobs.

Training includes nutrition education, résumé workshops, internships, and job placement services. Students work in the classroom and kitchen to prepare meals for distribution via **Project Nourish** to a number of locations that serve food-insecure community members.

Leveraging the FreshWorks Fund

Following the equipment purchases, KFG contracted with the Encinitas Senior Center to supply meals for its lunch program, which results in revenues of about \$60,000 per year.

Staff at Encinitas report improved quality and healthier, scratch-made meals compared to the previous vendor's products, noting "We haven't used our can opener since the KFG contract began."

Positive response has also attracted new business from other senior centers. As of summer 2016, KFG has increased its senior meals deliveries five-fold, from 250 to 1,250 meals per week.

The FreshWorks grant validated KFG's efforts and helped them "mobilize the funding community," stimulating support from other funders.

The \$50,000 grant was a game changer for us. The FreshWorks Fund got us into our kitchen and allowed us to get it operational so that on day one, we were already generating revenue. That was huge. For us to be able to hit the ground running and have momentum going allowed us to just ride that momentum. It becomes contagious.

– KFG executive director Jennifer Gilmore

Community impact

Examples of community impact from California FreshWorks investments include:

- **Improving the lives of young adults.** KFG has trained two cohorts of students, a total of 25 so far, in their fully functioning commercial kitchen via Project Launch. Young people convicted of felonies are now learning a profession and gaining the confidence to succeed in a work environment.
- **Healthier meals for seniors.** As of summer 2016, more than 1,200 seniors weekly are receiving healthy, affordable (or free) lunches at an area senior center. For many, it will be their best meal of the day and often represents their only social interaction.

How is the FreshWorks Fund Small Grants Program having an impact in California?

We surveyed 52 other FreshWorks Fund grantees. Among the 30 who responded, the majority reported sustaining, expanding, or growing their program beyond the grant funding. Of those, 13 were able to leverage their grant to secure additional grants or other financing; three other projects are now financially self-sufficient

Survey responses suggest that small grants support business development and planning, and have helped scale up projects through marketing, outreach, and purchasing additional equipment or space.

- **Healthier food for community members.** KFG's partner organization Heaven's Window serves more than 100 KFG ready-to-eat meals to food-insecure people each week. As of summer 2016, KFG will provide Heaven's Window with close to 1,500 meals per week, including meals for low-income students on summer break.
- **Vibrant Encanto community.** KFG's San Diego neighborhood is witnessing an increase in economic development, education, and access to healthy food. KFG plans to open a kiosk serving scratch-made meals directly to community residents.



Using the new equipment, a Project Launch student prepares meals with Project Reclaim food for distribution as part of Project Nourish.

What's next?

- **Scaling up:** KFG is in discussions with potential lenders about a large-scale financing package to purchase a 19,000 square-foot building that was formerly an industrial-scale bakery. That site would provide expanded capacity for culinary training, seniors' meal production, value-added and shelf-stable retail goods, food rescue operations, and a healthy café in what is currently a food desert.
- **Sustainability:** KFG has plans to grow Project Kitchen to the point that it can financially support all other programs making the organization entirely self-reliant, sustainable, and able to offer market-competitive wages to exceptional, passionate, and dedicated staff.

For more information about these programs, please visit kitchensforgood.org

FreshWorks is a public-private partnership loan fund created to bring grocery stores, markets that offer fresh produce, and other innovative forms of healthy food retail and distribution to communities where they are currently lacking.

Relatively small investments from the FreshWorks Fund Small Grants Program enable local social entrepreneurs to innovate, leverage assets, and scale their programs in an effort to increase access to healthy food and to contribute to their community's economic and social health.

As a nonprofit community development finance institution, Capital Impact Partners provides financial services and technical assistance that help make high-quality health care, healthy foods, housing, and education more accessible and attainable, and eldercare more dignified and respectful.

capitalimpact.org



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