

Culinary Training as a Pathway to Employment and Food Security

Sky Cagang¹; Toan Ha², Bradyn Stephenson³, David Conway⁴

¹ University of California, Riverside ² University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health ³ Slippery Rock University ⁴ University of Pittsburgh

BACKGROUND

- Community Kitchen Pittsburgh (CKP) is a culinary workforce program that opened in 2013 to help people with job barriers find stable employment.
- This organization also partners with the local food bank to salvage perishable food and make healthy meals to feed shelters for unhoused individuals. Access to healthy meals will improve the health and well-being of low-income individuals, reducing the risk of chronic illnesses.
- Students are learning culinary skills as well as participating in addressing food insecurity within Allegheny County.

OBJECTIVE

- Evaluate CKP's job placement outcomes.
- Assess its impact on food insecurity through meal production.

METHODS

- We calculated the ratio between the number of graduates and the number of job placements after a year of graduating from the program.
- We calculated the total number of meals made by students that were given out to homeless shelters.

RESULTS

- A total of job placement rate in 2024: 84%.
- During 2024, CKP served 425,568 community meals to food insecure and vulnerable community members through shelters, afterschool programs, and home delivered meals.

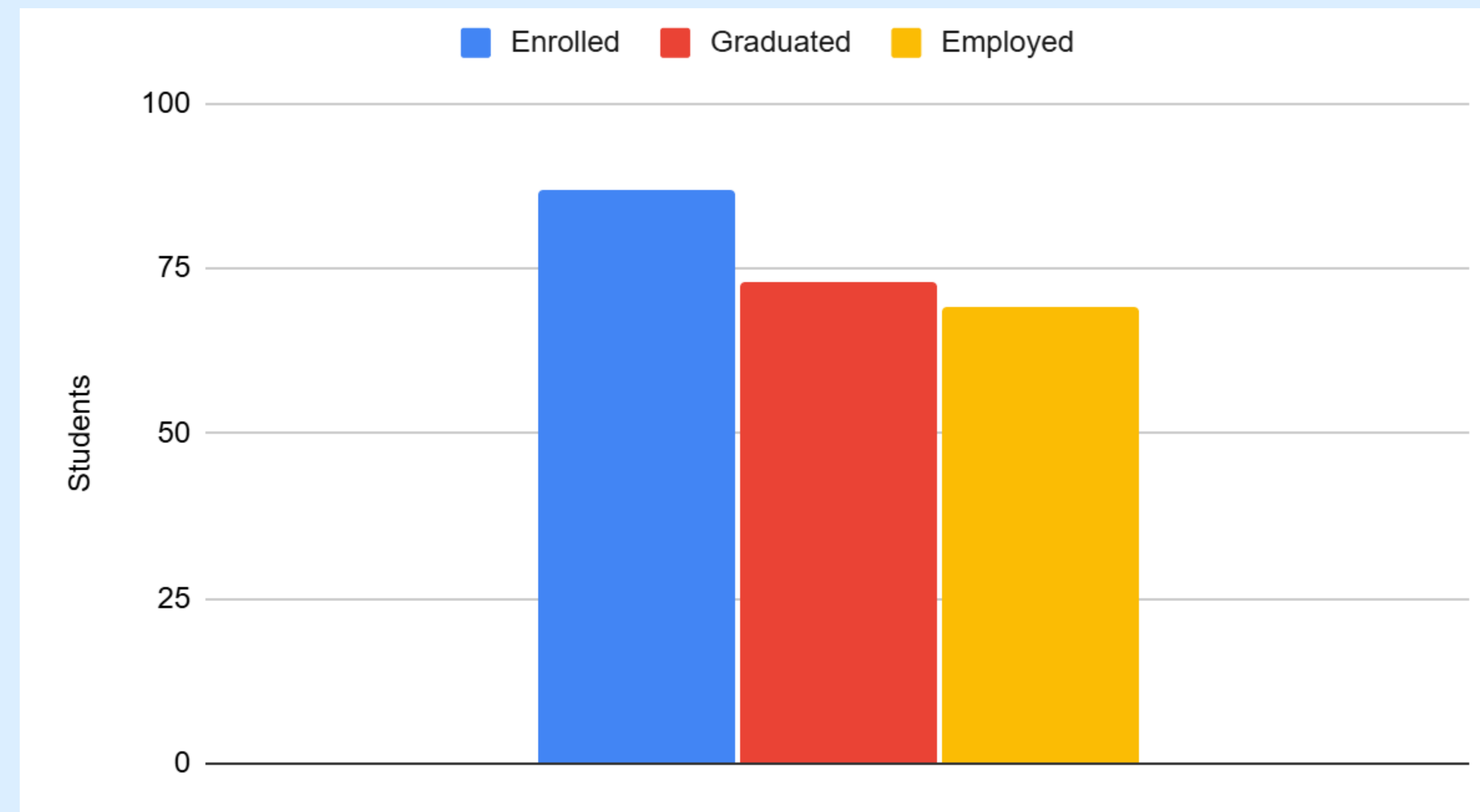


Figure 1. Culinary Program Outcomes in 2024: Enrollment, Completion, and Employment.

- In 2024, CKP had 87 participants enrolled in their full 3-month culinary program; 73 completed while 61 graduates secured and retained jobs in the industry.
- CKP helps people with employment barriers find stable jobs through the culinary industry in Pittsburgh while also addressing food insecurity among houseless individuals.



DISCUSSION

- While the job retention rate after graduation is high, retention within the workforce training program remains low. This is largely due to frequent program hopping by participants, often driven by the misuse of benefits such as weekly stipends and transportation support (e.g., bus passes). To increase the retention rate, intakes are done to maximize the enrollment rate of students who are looking for long-term employment.
- Students receive continued support through external referrals (e.g., housing, mental health, childcare) and are monitored consistently before, during, and after program completion through check-ins. Furthermore, participants have access to a resource guide spreadsheet (e.g., clothing, education, mothers, sexual assault).

LIMITATIONS

- Job placements are limited to CKP's partner organizations and culinary roles, targeting individuals with barriers (e.g., past incarceration, SNAP reliance, transportation issues).
- Lack of childcare may delay enrollment; active justice cases must be resolved externally before program entry. Additionally, shelters require funding to establish meal contracts with CKP.

CONCLUSION

- Community Kitchen Pittsburgh (CKP) demonstrates how a culinary workforce program can tackle both employment barriers and food insecurity.
- By teaching the students valuable skills and involving them in preparing meals for unhoused individuals, CKP strengthens the link between workforce development and public health.
- Its ongoing success may inspire similar programs across Pennsylvania and beyond to fund culinary training programs.

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Community Kitchen Pittsburgh. (2024). *Our impact*. <https://www.ckpgh.org/our-impact>
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