

---

# **Looking Back and Thinking Ahead**

**An evaluation and needs assessment  
of the  
Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition**

**Perspectives of  
Coalition members and community stakeholders**

**2006**

---

**Prepared by  
Kadi Row and Barb Lynch**

---

## **BACKGROUND ON THE COALITION**

The Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition (WCNC) is a network of over 30 member agencies dedicated to ending hunger in Waukesha County. Formed in 1995, the coalition represents food pantries, meal sites, shelters, congregations, community and government programs. Goals of the Coalition include:

- educating the community about the extent of hunger in Waukesha County,
- showing citizens how and where to find emergency food,
- developing recommendations for nutrition programs and policies, and
- increasing access to food in the community.

Since 1995, the WCNC has:

- met regularly to network and take action to address hunger,
- engaged in a strategic planning process,
- conducted two significant research studies of hunger in Waukesha, and
- provided leadership for several principal anti-hunger activities including: garden gleaning, food recovery, hunger and poverty awareness, food drives, and publication of food assistance directories.

---

## **BACKGROUND ON THIS PROJECT**

The Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition (WCNC) marked its 10 year anniversary in 2005. The Coalition leaders expressed interest in examining the progress of the group over this ten year time period, documenting accomplishments and assessing needs for the future. In order to achieve this, the Coalition leaders worked with evaluators to design and conduct an evaluation and needs assessment for the Coalition. Primary goals of this project were to:

- assess and document accomplishments of the WCNC,
- identify current needs and future directions for the Coalition, and
- provide a common understanding and historical perspective to current members, particularly new members.

This report summarizes the methods and findings of this evaluation project and provides recommendations for next steps for the Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition.

---

## **METHODS**

This evaluation project was designed and conducted by Kadi Row, University of Wisconsin-Extension Food Security Specialist and Barb Lynch, an outside consultant, with consultation from Ellen Taylor-Powell, University of Wisconsin-Extension Evaluation Specialist. The evaluators used three main methods to collect data for the project: focus groups with current and past coalition members, interviews with community stakeholders, and a review of Coalition documents. Prior to the start of the project, the methodology received human subjects approval from the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

### **Focus Groups**

Three focus groups were conducted in May 2006 with current and past Coalition members, with a total of 22 participants. An attempt was made to select homogenous groups for each focus group. One group was predominantly current, active, long-standing members; the second group was predominantly current, but relatively new members; and the third group was past or inactive current members. Questions used for all focus groups are in the Appendix. Notes were taken during the focus groups, and the focus groups were also tape recorded for review at a later date.

### **Interviews**

Telephone or in-person interviews were conducted in May and June 2006 with 10 individuals. These individuals worked with the Coalition on specific individual projects or were stakeholders in the Waukesha County community, but were not directly connected to the Coalition. Questions used for the interviews are in the Appendix.

### **Document Review**

Evaluators reviewed documents from WCNC activities from the past 10 years. Included in the document review were research results, the strategic plan summary, annual reports, project summaries, newspaper clippings, Coalition promotional and educational materials, and pictures.

---

## **FINDINGS**

Accomplishments of the Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition have been significant over the past 10 years. A description of Coalition accomplishments and success can be broken down into two categories – projects and processes.

### **Projects**

There are several key long term projects of the Coalition. Many have been evaluated by the Coalition, and focus group and interview participants were able to comment on their outcomes as well. A description and results of these individual projects follows. One overall finding worth noting is that members and stakeholders are able to speak knowledgeably about the programs and generally positively about their outcomes, but they are not always clear that these are projects of the Coalition (as opposed to UWEX projects, for example.) More about this finding appears in the recommendations section of this report.

Key projects include:

#### **Garden Gleaning**

This program collects and documents fresh produce donations from farmers' markets, a Huber garden program, local gardeners, and youth garden programs. The 5-year impact (2000-2005) of this program documents that a total of 125,878 pounds of fresh produce was collected and donated to meal programs and food pantries within the communities where it was collected.

*It's nice if there is additional produce that it doesn't go to waste and that there is someone that can use it and can enjoy it.*

*From a giving standpoint I know that people feel really good about giving produce and items that they know are going to be used and appreciated.*

#### **Food Recovery**

Since 2002, a value of over \$1,209,000 of food has been collected and distributed throughout the county. The program has 100 donating businesses and 55 receiving agencies.

*We are so pleased with and committed to the food recovery project that in our upcoming reconstruction we are adding freezer space and a food prep room to accommodate the increased donations.*

#### **Sensitivity Trainings**

The WCNC offers Poverty Simulations to help participants better understand the realities faced by low income residents. Over 5 years (2001-2006), 416 community leaders, agency staff, educators, law enforcement, elected officials and others have experienced the Simulation.

*I now have a better understanding and appreciation for the day to day struggles that these families deal with.*

*I learned that people facing poverty have many more problems than I was aware of.*

### **Adopt-a-Route**

This program is a campaign designed to address the ongoing need for volunteer drivers to deliver meals to homebound seniors. In 2001, volunteers helped deliver over 95,000 meals for the county. However, due to a rapid increase in the senior population and program enrollment, more drivers are needed.

### **Food Assistance Directory**

This directory, printed in English and Spanish, is compiled and updated annually. It helps low income families connect to food assistance programs. Locations, hours, and a description of the assistance provided are outlined for federal nutrition assistance programs, emergency food outlets, and senior, youth and community meal programs.

Past projects include:

#### **School Breakfast Program**

The WCNC supported an advocacy project in 1997 to begin the first school breakfast program in Waukesha County.

#### **The Backpack Program**

This project helps provide children entering foster care a backpack of personal items, nutritious snacks, games and toys. The WCNC started this program, and currently another organization takes leadership for its coordination.

#### **\$14/day Challenge**

To raise awareness of hunger issues, the WCNC has used a \$14/day challenge. This event challenges county leaders to see if they can shop for a family of four on \$14 a day – the maximum amount allowed on food stamps to cover three meals and a snack for the family. The exercise highlights just some of the difficulties faced by low income families.

#### **Food Drives**

WCNC has had roles in the past in organizing food drives.

### **Processes**

In addition to the specific projects listed above, there are several accomplishments of the Coalition that could be categorized as “processes”. These processes are listed below along with a description of the outcomes (for Waukesha County, the WCNC, and/or its members) that transpired as a result of them.

## **A) Networking**

One major goal of the coalition, clear in its mission statement, is to serve as a network for the agencies and organizations in the County that work on hunger issues. In practice, the networking of the Coalition over the years has been tremendous. Several components of the Coalition structure and function have contributed to effective networking:

Meeting structure: meetings are frequent (monthly), well attended (attendance is now one requirement of membership), and well planned (program topics are organized a year in advance); meeting time is split between a program (learning time) and sharing (networking time).

Coordination: Several aspects of the coordination of the WCNC were seen as key elements of success:

Strong leadership:

*Melinda is a great facilitator. She knows all the agencies.*

*Her attitude, her personality, always keeping up with people, checking things out...that just made a huge difference*

A paid coordinator:

*Getting a part-time paid coordinator through the grant...was a turning point.*

Regular meeting minutes:

*Wonderful, wonderful minutes.*

*We get the best notes. They tell you everything.*

Standards for membership:

*We had some agencies...that weren't really participating and weren't really acting in a way that was beneficial to clients. So we set up membership rules...to be part of the Coalition, this is what you have to abide by, this is how you have to treat people.*

*It really did change the way we were looked at...more professional.*

Agency sharing time: Attention has been paid to the value of sharing time, where agencies can discuss current needs, issues, status, etc. Members attest to a period of time where sharing time was eliminated. Negative ramifications of this change, most notably reduced attendance, instigated a return of the practice.

### **How does this networking help Waukesha County?**

Members report being more effective in their individual jobs. They are better informed about what each other is doing. Positive outcomes of this are that it helps reduce any duplication in efforts.

*The Coalition is a great umbrella organization to bring all the resources together so you're not repeating yourselves.*

*We're not reinventing the wheel ever, we're sharing information.*

*We're able to share what our needs are.*

It also helps members serve their clients more effectively, because members can then make referrals to each other, and can help clients get what they need.

*Because (we) know each other, if there is something that comes up with one of her clients or mine, we can talk and figure out something we may not have done previously that's going to directly benefit our client base or better utilize our resources.*

*Those sorts of relationships benefit the county as a whole because our clients are getting the resources they need...enabling them to be better workers, better students, better residents.*

*I take so much information back so I can help my families help themselves.*

Members also report that the networking at meetings gives them a sense of belonging to a "community of others" that work on these same issues day to day. Several members report that this time is crucial to *recharging their batteries* and *keeping them motivated to continue this work*.

*I think of the Nutrition Coalition almost as a little community where I can go for help, and I do.*

*The mentoring aspects. That's one of the things that's been huge for me is there are times when you feel like you're all alone at this and to be able to, if you can't wait til the next meeting, to be able to pick up the phone (for help).*

*\_\_\_\_\_ is one of the people I look to to keep me from being jaded, to kinda keep my head and my heart where it needs to be and we wouldn't have that without the Coalition.*

## **B) Strategic Planning**

In 2001, the WCNC completed a strategic planning process. Through this process the WCNC determined its goals and strategies for the future and refined its mission statement. The strategic plan summary outlines components of the Coalition and desired outcomes.

*(Strategic planning) really helped us to define who we were, what we needed to do and where we needed to go.*

*It really helped sustain the group and give us some direction as far as what our role in the community.*

Through this evaluation project, it was evident that several longer term members recalled the strategic planning process and subsequent plan summary. Some remarked that they were able to recall the process, but could not recall results of the process, if any. Many newer members of the WCNC were not aware there was a strategic plan for the Coalition, though made comments to indicate that the work of the Coalition today is not inconsistent with the plan. It was evident that currently in-active members were not clear about the Coalition's mission and goals. Refer to the recommendations section for more discussion on this point.

### **How does the strategic planning help Waukesha County?**

Generally, strategic planning can help an organization learn and to make decisions about its future based on that learning.<sup>1</sup> The WCNC's strategic plan, if implemented, would presumably result in furthering the Coalition's goals of addressing hunger and nutrition issues in Waukesha County. Based on the results of this evaluation, the WCNC's strategic planning process completed in 2001 did help to refine the Coalitions goals and shape future activities. Further reflections from the Coalition leadership may help to clarify whether and how the plan actually directed future activities.

### **C) Research projects**

Waukesha County has completed two major research projects to help describe hunger in the county and guide responses to the issue. The first, in 1995, resulted in several findings, one of which was the formation of the WCNC. The second, in 1999, was designed to repeat some of the original (1999) research to document change and further characterize the issue.

### **How does this research help Waukesha County?**

Both research projects served as needs assessments to document hunger and needs related to hunger. This type of research is especially valuable in raising awareness of hunger, particularly in a county such as Waukesha that is characterized by very high median incomes and low poverty rates. The 1995 research project provided the impetus to create the WCNC, for which all the subsequent accomplishments in this report are attributed.

### **D) Speakers and trainings at Coalition meetings**

Members speak highly of the quality and variety of speakers and trainings at the monthly meetings. Many comments were made about specific topics, revealing a lasting impact from the information shared. Members appreciated the advance scheduling of topics.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Strategic Planning** By Frank Martinelli Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations collaboration, <http://www.uwex.edu/li/learner/q-a1.htm>

**How do the monthly speakers help Waukesha County?**

Members said the topics covered increased their own knowledge and understanding of other programs and issues, and further, that they often shared this learning with staff or clients back at their agencies or organizations.

*Presentations are amazing! I take info back to our staff to educate.*

**E) Five year celebration**

At the end of 1999, the WCNC hosted a 5 year celebration of the Coalition and accomplishments. The event served as an open house for agency members and staff and other community stakeholders; an opportunity to recognize the Coalition’s leader; and an event to showcase accomplishments.

**How did this celebration help Waukesha County?**

The celebration was well organized, well attended and generated an opportunity for wider press coverage of the WCNC. It was striking how many long time Coalition members remembered and reflected positively on this event. Comments from members indicate that the event was successful, served as a “pat on the back” for the leadership and members of WCNC, and helped rejuvenate energy about the Coalition.

*We had a good turnout, there were other people who came, it was a great event.*

---

## **WHAT NEEDS STILL EXIST THAT THE COALITION MAY BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT?**

Participants in focus groups and interviews for this evaluation project were asked what specific needs still exist in Waukesha County. From the list of needs generated, participants were asked which needs would be something that the WCNC could attempt to address. Following are the main suggestions of respondents.

**Supply of emergency food** – Clearly, there is an ongoing need for emergency food supplies. Comments were that food recovery and gleaning programs were successful and would be even more so with more food/donations. As is often heard throughout the state and county, food pantries have periods of limited food supplies. Respondents linked this limited supply to both a lack of enough food flowing into the outlets, and to an increased demand at pantries.

*We always need more food. There are supply problems.*

*We need more food recovery....so much wasted food.*

*\_\_\_\_\_ won't give out fresh produce that is close to being past prime, they toss it. Maybe it's time for the Nutrition Coalition...to say "how can we change this?"*

**“One stop shopping” website** – Respondents were familiar with the Waukesha County 211 system and the Coalition’s food assistance directory. Several members suggested that a website be developed and maintained by the Coalition to house this information. Since the food assistance directory is already posted on the Coalition website, we suspect that members need to be reminded it is there, or members need to be queried about what additional information needs to be posted on the web, or in what different format, in order to be more helpful.

*Need to have that one umbrella site with a million and one links....user friendly for agencies and clients alike.*

**Limited access to food** – Respondents indicated that the City of Waukesha, in particular, has seen the closing of major grocery stores in recent years. Lack of access to a supermarket has been shown to reduce the quality of diets and increase costs for low income families. Members suggested this issue might be something the Coalition would be able to address.

*With busses, even people who are able bodied who can get to the pantries in Waukesha (but not in outlying areas) then once they get their food it's really tough to walk to the bus stop and get home.*

*Closing of some of the big grocery stores...there isn't access to reasonably priced food because they are gone.*

**Changes in audience served** – Respondents reflected on a change in the demographic being served by food assistance programs. By and large, they have observed a recent increase in the

number of “newly unemployed”. Members suggested that this change in the audience served might have ramifications for how services are marketed or delivered, as well as an opportunity for raising awareness of who is hungry in Waukesha County today.

*I have noticed one of the age groups that suffers the most is in the fifties. It's almost like a lost generation. They lose their job and they're almost unemployable. I spend more time with them than any other age group because they're just depleted...they have no money. They brought up their kids and the kids are just now moving out and they are just at the point where they're gonna start saving some money and they get fired.*

*They are responsible people. They just can't find work.*

*They've never been unemployed before.*

*There's an increase in immigrants.*

**Community awareness of hunger** – In every focus group, and in almost every interview, respondents concurred that the WCNC has a primary role in improving community awareness of hunger. Clearly there is a belief that the Coalition has already worked along these lines and done so effectively. The main point being made was that it is an ongoing need and something that the Coalition should continue to work towards.

*We have to find a way to educate people that this is government's responsibility. We really truly have such abundance here; we can't have these gaping holes.*

*The awareness raising component is always important, especially in one of the most wealthiest counties in the state. It's vital to have a Coalition that has the awareness that there were people in need of help.*

**Dispel myth of pantry user** – Along the lines of the previous two outstanding needs, respondents indicated an ongoing need to dispel the myth of who uses assistance programs, specifically food pantries. Suggestions were along the lines of continuing to promote the reality of the working poor, and the high cost of living as compared to wages in Waukesha County.

*The (people) we encounter tend to be people who never accessed services before and so they try to do everything on their own until they're at the point they're almost losing their homes.*

*It was reported...that there were some people with real fine cars coming to the food pantry. It turned out that...because they had lost employment, they couldn't make their house payments...so here again the house payment had to be paid, the car payment had to be paid, but they had no money left for food.*

*If (pantry clients) have children, those children deserve to eat whether the parents deserve it or not or made these choices.*

*It's really not fair to make a judgment...because you don't really know what the background information is...did the breadwinner just pass away...there could be an illness.*

**Advocacy** – The need for advocacy on hunger issues is seen as a need for Waukesha, though only some respondents thought it was a good role for the Coalition -- i.e., some felt that the WCNC should engage in more direct advocacy on particular issues, while others were not sure this was consistent with the mission of the WCNC. The discussion of advocacy in one focus group, in particular, clearly highlighted that some past and inactive members did not know the core mission of the WCNC.

*We need to have a letter and a format and list everyone that belongs to the Coalition and send it to the Governor, send it to the Senators, and say, "you need to keep this program because we are 40 different agencies that depend on this program."*

*The bigger the voice the better.*

**Marketing of the coalition** – Particularly in stakeholder interviews, but also to some degree in focus groups, respondents revealed they did not always know that Coalition activities were, actually, Coalition activities, as opposed to, say, UWEX activities. This was apparent indirectly by comments which made clear that the respondents did not understand that certain activities were Coalition activities, and directly by respondents indicating that they thought the Coalition would be well served to market itself and its activities to improve general understanding.

*I think the whole issue of public awareness of the Coalition. We all know how great we are and what we've done...even among political leaders...people in key positions, it still is a pretty unknown group.*

**There is still poverty and hunger and homelessness** - Just about every group or respondent mentioned that, obviously, there is still poverty, hunger and homelessness in Waukesha County, and thus there was an ongoing need for the WCNC and its activities.

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As a results of the feedback received through focus groups, interviews and a document review, the evaluators are able to make the following recommendations to the WCNC.

- Marketing
  - Among members, stakeholders, and external parties, there is an opportunity to improve understanding of the Coalition, its activities, accomplishments and goals. It is important that current members are on board and clear about mission and goals. Revisiting the strategic plan (see the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet in this section) may help with this.
  - Among stakeholders and clients, there is clearly a gap in understanding of what the Coalition is and which activities are “of the Coalition”. It may be important to improve this understanding in order to boost awareness and credibility of the WCNC, to aid in fundraising, or for other reasons.
  - Among stakeholders, there is a desire to be reminded of the benefits of their work with the coalition. We recommend that the WCNC “close the feedback loop” and be sure stakeholders hear of the impact of their participation and contributions. For example, venders and the coordinator at the farmers market might receive a flier or other type of feedback that documents pounds of food collected, where it’s distributed, maybe even a client comment or two.
- The Coalition is well placed to work on (or to continue working on) many of the ideas from prior section (needs that still exist in Waukesha County). Certainly the projects or processes currently being done by WCNC are working to address these needs. It would be useful to compare the current projects of the Coalition against the goals in the plan and the needs listed above to confirm they are consistent.
- Regarding the strategic plan, it would be very useful to re-assess the strategic plan, examine outcomes desired v. outcomes achieved, get buy-in to the existing or revised strategic plan by of all members and stakeholders, and confirm the mission (band-aid v. root causes).
- Celebrate networking – Because the value of “networking” came out as a strong benefit/accomplishment of the WCNC, it confirms the importance of this feature of monthly meetings. The networking is accomplished by attendance at the meetings, but also through the minutes which are very highly praised by members as timely and thorough. The recommendation we make is to affirm the role that networking plays in your group and certainly continue what you are doing in this regard.
- A recommendation that crosses several ideas above (reassessing strategic plan, celebrating networking and marketing) would be to host a Celebration, a la the 5 year celebration, for internal and external stakeholders. The 5 year celebration was well received and well remembered. This might be a good time to have another such celebration.

---

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the WCNC is highly regarded by members (current, past, active and inactive) and by community stakeholders. They perceive the Coalition as highly functional, with very effective leadership. They believe the WCNC has shown great flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs and members over the years.

Accomplishments of the Coalition have been significant and varied, and generally in line with the mission and goals of the WCNC.

Participants were clear that hunger is still a need that exists in Waukesha County, and that the WCNC is well placed to address the issue.

Appendix  
Focus Group Questions

**Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition Project  
Focus Group Questions**

1. Tell us about your involvement with the coalition.
2. Think about the coalition's activities. Take a few minutes to jot down all of the projects, activities, and initiatives the coalition has been involved with over the last ten years. (Put up a timeline) Now who would like to share what they wrote?
3. Through all of this work, what difference do you think the coalition has made in Waukesha County?
4. What else was going on in Waukesha County or Wisconsin during this timeline that may have impacted our work either positively or negatively?
5. Take a few minutes to think about what needs currently exist in Waukesha County related to hunger. Please share your thoughts.
6. Can the coalition make a difference with respect to these needs and what would that role be?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share? (about the coalition, about the accomplishments, about future needs?)

Appendix  
Interview Questions

**Waukesha County Nutrition Coalition Project**

**Interview Questions**

1. *For Project Collaborators only:*

Describe your project.

Tell me what has worked well with your project. What has been positive?

What has been challenging and is there more that could be done?

What would the barriers be to accomplishing that?

Are you familiar with the Waukesha County Nutrition coalition? Would your project have happened without the coalition?

2. *For Other Partners only:*

Tell me how you have worked with the coalition.

Describe your experience working with the coalition.

Has it been positive? How?

Has it been challenging? How?

3. How has the coalition or this project benefited Waukesha County?

4. What needs currently exist in Waukesha County related to hunger.

5. Can the coalition or this project make a difference with respect to these needs and what would that role be?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share? (about the coalition, about the accomplishments, about future needs?)