

Investing in Healthy Children, Strong Families, and Caring Communities Family Living Programs, 2007

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In 2007, county government in Wisconsin invested about \$4.6 million in Family Living Programs faculty and staff. What did counties in Wisconsin get for that investment?

These funds leveraged:

- \$6.2 million in state and federal funds,
- more than \$11 million in outside grants and contracts,
- \$3.8 million contributed as cost share by partners, and
- cost savings benefits that impact communities throughout the state.

Many of the challenges faced by our state are expensive to fix. But they are far less expensive to prevent through well-designed educational programs that help families better manage their financial resources, improve their skills as parents, maintain healthier lifestyles, acquire safe and affordable housing, and contribute to their communities. Family Living Programs improve lives and lower costs for governments and communities.

Almost 1.4 million families live in Wisconsin. Almost one-third have children less than 18 years of age. Here are examples of UW-Extension Family Living Programs investments in educational programs that result in stronger families and communities.

Family Strengthening, Building Statewide Capacity

Wisconsin families struggle to manage busy schedules and find effective ways to communicate and stay involved in their kid's lives. Research shows that protective parenting and strong relationships between parents and youth can steer youth away from dangerous behaviors like juvenile delinquency and underage alcohol and drug use.

Over the past five years, Family Living Programs has provided leadership bringing facilitator trainings for the Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14 across the state. Over 50 Extension county educators, and over 175 local partners, have been trained to teach this proven effective program. ***Every one dollar spent in implementing the program produces at least \$9.60 in savings in alcohol-related costs. Results of the program show that participating youth were less likely to use alcohol and other drugs, less aggressive and had fewer conduct problems.*** The program not only avoids negative outcomes for individuals and families, but also achieves substantial economic savings in treatment costs.

Parent Education—What Parents Need to Know

Parent education and support programs that begin in pregnancy or soon after the birth of a child can help reduce child abuse and neglect. Family Living Programs provide three instructional, age-paced newsletters for parents –*Preparing to Parent, Parenting the First Year* and *Parenting the Second and Third Years*. Parents learn about promoting optimal child development, through guidance and discipline ideas and language learning activities. Approximately 35,000 families, nearly half of all new parents in Wisconsin,

received *Parenting the First Year* newsletters last year. Approximately 520,000 families have received *Parenting the First Year* since the project began 18 years ago. This means that, approximately 1 in every 12 Wisconsin residents, and half of Wisconsin children, have been raised by a parent who received this parenting education program. An additional 22,000 Wisconsin families received *Parenting the Second and Third Years* last year.

Newsletters reach parents who most need parenting education but are also the least likely to come to a class. UW-Extension offices in 65 counties coordinate distribution of the newsletters. Partners include more than 140 Kiwanis Clubs, 85 hospitals and health departments, and dozens of other businesses and service clubs.

Significant outcomes are making a difference in the state's future. Parents change both their beliefs and actions in raising their children. Parents rate the *Parenting the First Year* newsletter series "very useful" as a source of child rearing advice more often than any other source. ***Parents who receive Parenting the First Year, compared to those who don't, have beliefs significantly less like those of child abusing parents. Parents who receive Parenting the First Year report spanking or slapping their babies significantly less often than comparable parents who did not receive the newsletters.***

Family Caregiving

One in three adults will care for a family member at some time in their lives. Seventy-five percent of these caregivers are women, with 50 percent of them juggling work, family and caregiving. Although caring for a family member can be personally satisfying, many caregivers feel burdened. As many as 70% of employers surveyed are reporting an increase in staffing problems associated with family caregiving responsibilities. National annual costs to employers are over \$11 billion. The Wisconsin Alliance for Family Caregiving, with leadership from Family Living Programs, and AARP, provides education to family caregivers. Almost 400 class leaders – educators, social workers, health-care providers, aging network professionals -- teach the six-week curriculum, reaching more than 2,000 caregivers. ***Taking Care of You: Powerful Tools for Caregiving that helps caregivers build effective communication skills, reduce personal stress, and set important and realistic goals.*** Employers are benefiting and communities are rethinking long term care.

Access to Health Insurance for Kids and Families

According to the Family Health Survey, conducted annually by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, 79,000 children in Wisconsin were without health insurance for at least part of the year. These numbers are unexpectedly high given the availability of health insurance programs for low-income families in Wisconsin—BadgerCare and Medicaid.

Family Living Programs supported the efforts of the Covering Kids and Families Coalition. ***Outreach efforts have increased the number of children enrolled in BadgerCare through joint promotion with the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.*** These public health insurance programs with their focus on preventive health screenings allow for the identification and treatment of health problems before they

compromise either the educational advancement or other health aspects for children. It is important to link the idea that a “good school start should be a healthy school start.” In 2005, more than 130 outreach efforts were conducted in 60 counties.

Family Economic Security – Build Wealth, Not Debt

The financial situation of families has changed notably in recent years. Many Wisconsin families struggle to make ends meet. As debt loads grow and savings decrease, families jeopardize their financial security and are vulnerable to unexpected financial emergencies. Wisconsin families manage almost \$88 billion dollars in annual family income. Educational programs help families meet future needs while keeping pace with day-to-day obligations, and help them address financial goals, health care and housing issues and self-sufficiency in retirement. **Participants gain the knowledge, skills, motivation, and confidence to make their own financial decisions.** Family Living Programs has recently been certified to offer education and credit counseling for the increasing number of individuals facing bankruptcy and is part of a national effort reaching more than a half-million youth annually with financial education. Family Living educators build awareness of tax credits, provide volunteer programs that offer financial counseling and tax preparation for low income workers, and develop financial knowledge and skills so that individuals use banking services.

The cost of housing has outpaced inflation. Median-priced home prices have increased more than 70% in ten years. Family income has not kept pace with these increases. Lack of adequate housing is a deterrent to economic development and to attracting jobs. **Cooperative Extension is building capacity in citizens and communities to obtain, sustain and create affordable housing. Program participants are better prepared as consumers and more satisfied renters and homeowners.**

Healthy, Well-nourished Families

Raising Healthy Eaters

In Wisconsin, 25 percent of 2 to 5-year-old children are either overweight or at risk of being overweight. Seventy-six percent of children between 2 and 5 years have poor diets. Providing parents with knowledge can promote success in feeding and healthy eating behaviors. Family Living Educators with experience in both parenting and nutrition are in the ideal position to conduct this education in their counties.

Parents participating in *Raising Healthy Eaters*, a series of eight user-friendly lessons, increased their knowledge of age-appropriate feeding practices, reduced television during mealtime, and increased confidence in getting children to try new foods and consume water instead of sweetened beverages. **These changes indicate an improvement in feeding practices that will lead to healthier children and lower rates of overweight in children, and lower health care costs.**

School Breakfast

Both low-income and moderate-income children are less likely to skip breakfast if their school participates in the School Breakfast Program. **Through the collaboration of Family Living Programs and the Department of Public Instruction school breakfast**

participation has increased in the past year. The Food Research and Action Center's annual score card indicates that **Wisconsin had the largest increase in breakfast participation in the nation for 2005-2006**, an increase of 24%. 433 new schools were offering breakfast and 373 schools improved the breakfast program. Family Living Programs' role has been to provide research-based information, education, outreach and support to county-based efforts to expand the breakfast program.

Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP)

WNEP, a \$7 million federally funded program, led by Family Living Programs, provides community-based nutrition education programs in 60 counties. WNEP helps ensure that low-income families and youth have the information they need to make healthy choices. **Community-based nutrition education programs made more than 312,000 in educational contacts in 2006.** Almost one-quarter of learners were people of color. The program targets food stamp eligible pregnant women, families with children, youth, adults and the elderly. Nearly 900 community-based partnerships supported the program. These included public sector agencies such as public health, WIC, and county municipal governments as well as private non-profits and schools.

Six Wisconsin counties (Milwaukee, Rock, Dane, Racine, Kenosha, and Waukesha) participate in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). EFNEP reached 1506 youth and 2041 adults with educational programs in 2004. Multiple cost-benefit analyses in several states have highlighted the value of nutrition education. **EFNEP saves states and families money: for every dollar invested in EFNEP, health care costs were reduced by \$10.64 in Virginia; \$8.82 in a group of Midwestern states; \$8.03 in Iowa.** Wisconsin has documented impacts, as well. At least 78% of program participants improved in one or more nutrition practices, such as considering healthful choices when selecting food, reading nutrition labels, planning meals, feeding children breakfast; 71% improved in one or more food resource management practices, such as planning meals, comparing prices, using grocery lists, and 63% improved in one or more of the safe food handling practices, such as thawing food safely and storing food properly.

The program encourages individuals and families to improve their diets, and increase physical activity. Studies show that people who run out of food or miss meals because they cannot afford them are among the most obese. Reductions in levels of obesity save health care costs.

Communities Document Food Insecurity and Hunger

Food security—the assured access to enough food for a healthy, active life—is vital to the wellbeing of children. Yet, twelve percent of households with elementary school age children in Wisconsin experience food insecurity—around twice the rate found among childless households. Food insecurity puts children at risk for a variety of negative developmental outcomes. Compared to their peers in food-secure households, children in food-insecure households have worse math and reading scores, demonstrate poorer social skills, have more behavior problems, and experience worse health outcomes.

To help schools and communities get a better picture of hunger and food insecurity, Family Living Programs developed a survey for elementary school children to bring home to their parents. Since 2003, 70 elementary schools serving children in 23

Wisconsin counties in all parts of the state have participated in the Wisconsin Schools Food Security Survey. These schools have learned new, often surprising, information about the prevalence of food insecurity in their community. Seventy-seven percent of food-insecure households have one or more fulltime workers.

The school surveys are providing new information about community characteristics that help lessen the risk of food insecurity and hunger. Lower housing costs, proximity to supermarkets, and access to public transportation appear to help families maintain food security. ***Findings from the survey have stimulated a variety of local initiatives and the creation of food pantries. Some schools have begun outreach efforts to ensure that families know about available food assistance programs and explored ways to enhance nutritional quality of meals served at school.***

Nutrition programming improves access to sufficient, safe, affordable, healthful food. Faculty and staff assess local levels of food insecurity, raise public awareness, and work collaboratively to make more families food secure. Extension works to help limited resource families achieve food security by teaching the skills they need to track spending, manage food dollars and plan nutritious meals.

Community Leadership and Planning in Support of Children and Families

Family Living Programs engage people and their communities in positive change Faculty and staff serve in leadership positions that support the improvement of community life for families. They lead systems and strategic planning, organize educational programs and help communities achieve goals based on local needs. Community capacity is strengthened around issues of positive outcomes for children and families. Through these efforts, residents and professional partners, report greater skill in community building, needs assessment and evaluation surrounding issues of hunger, obesity, affordable housing, health care, juvenile delinquency and parenting issues.

Educational planning, evaluation, and research skills save local agencies and departments thousands of dollars and help improve their capacities to meet the needs of children and families.

When local institutions, agencies and groups work more closely with one another to coordinate services and programs and share resources and expertise, they are not only more cost efficient but more effective. County-based Family Living Programs is an excellent investment in initiatives important to local communities that can best be advanced by research-driven, community-based education.

Family Living Programs promote family strengths and help communities become positive environments for family life. Community-based education provides direct teaching to individuals, better equips staff from our public and private partners, and informs decision-makers. Local, state, and national leaders are more and more understanding the reality that people who do not benefit from a healthy home and community environment simply are not as productive and happy as people who live in strong communities supported by strong educational programs.

Additional examples found at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/impact/index.cfm>