

Family Living Programs

Nutrition Education Program Reaches Low Income Families Across the State in 2007

Situation

In 2005, 8.7 percent of Wisconsin residents and 11 percent of Wisconsin children lived in poverty. In many more households, incomes are above the poverty line, but are still low enough to qualify families for government programs such as food stamps. Statewide unemployment rates continue to rise and use of emergency food sources, such as food pantries, is at an all time high. Food Stamp participation is also on the rise. In 2006, 554,020 Wisconsin residents participated in the Food Stamp Program—approximately seven percent of the population.

Response

The University of Wisconsin-Extension Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) responds to the diverse needs and resources of the poor by implementing community-based nutrition education programs. A major portion of WNEP is Food Stamp Nutrition Education—a partnership between the Food and Nutrition Service of USDA, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and University of Wisconsin-Extension.

During fiscal year 2006-2007, UW-Extension Nutrition Education (WNEP) was offered in 60 counties of Wisconsin. WNEP educators made 317,997 educational contacts during 2006-2007. Twenty-five percent of the program participants were parents of infants or children; 51% of the participants were school age youth; 11% were older adults; 6% were adults without children, and 7% were preschool children. Persons of many diverse cultural groups were reached by WNEP educators: 25% of participants were people of color: 12% African American, 4% Asian, 4% Native American and 5% other races. Thirteen percent of the educational contacts were with persons who were identified as Hispanic or Latino.

Outcomes

Working with Partner Agencies. WNEP staff provided community-based nutrition education programs in partnership with 754 agencies, including public sector or government-funded agencies, private non-profits, schools, private sector agencies and others.

Teaching School-age Youth. Forty counties provided education to youths 6 to 17 years old either during the school day or at summer or after school programs. There were 140,973 direct teaching contacts with youths 6 to 11 years old and 22,086 direct teaching contacts with youths 12 to 17 years old.

- **Youth learned to make healthful food choices**

Before the lessons, 44% of 1,600 students knew how much milk to drink each day; 92% knew the answer after the lessons. Before the lessons, 59% of 260 students were able to identify the healthiest fast food choice; 97% knew the correct answer after the lessons.

- **Youth learned important food safety concepts**

Before the lessons, 49% of 800 students knew they should wash their hands before preparing a sandwich, and 90% identified the correct response after the lessons. Before the lessons, 59% of

1000 students were able to identify how to wash their hands properly, and 95% knew the correct response after the lessons.

- **Parents reported that their children were eating more fruits and vegetables**

After completing a series of lessons in elementary school classrooms, WNEP educators in several counties sent a survey home to parents. 1365 parents returned completed surveys. 52% of the parents reported that their children were more willing to taste new foods; 31% reported that their children asked them to buy a fruit or vegetable that they usually don't buy; 50% reported that their children were eating more fruit and 38% reported that their children were eating more vegetables.

Teaching at WIC Clinics

WNEP educational programs made 27,921 educational contacts at WIC clinics during the year. Most of the lessons reinforced WIC topics such as choosing healthful foods and feeding infants and children.

- **WIC participants learned to stretch their food dollars by using WIC foods**

Educators taught thousands of low-income adults at WIC clinics about preparing and storing foods they obtain through WIC, like dry beans, cereals, and juice. After the lessons 641 learners were asked if they had learned something that would make it easier to use WIC foods in family meals and snacks—73% said they had.

- **WIC participants plan to eat more fruits and vegetables**

A major emphasis was teaching WIC participants about fruits and vegetables. After a lesson on fruits, 730 learners were asked if they were going to try to eat more fruit as a result of what they had learned—83% said that there were going to do so. Following a lesson on vegetables, 428 learners were asked if they were going to try to eat more vegetables as a result of what they had learned—84% said that there were going to do so.

- **WIC staff reported that WNEP lessons are making a difference**

WIC staff in 14 counties were asked to complete a short survey about their observations of the difference that WNEP educational programming was making for WIC participants. Thirty-two WIC colleagues completed the survey. 70% of the respondents said that they had noticed or heard comments that WIC participants were using recipes for WIC foods that were provided with WNEP lessons. 61% of the respondents said that they had noticed or heard comments that WIC participants were eating more vegetables; 55% said WIC participants were eating more fruits; and 47% said WIC participants were eating more whole grain foods. 50% of the respondents said that they had noticed or heard comments that WIC participants were using WIC foods more in family meals and snacks since participating in WNEP lessons.

Teaching at Senior Dining Sites

Older adults who make healthier choices live longer and better lives. However older adults consume inadequate amounts of key nutrients, and low-income older adults tend to have poorer diets than their higher-income peers. During 2007, WNEP made over 33,000 teaching contacts with older adults at Senior Dining Centers and Senior Housing Sites in 44 counties. Nutrition educators discussed a variety of topics with seniors, including eating more fruits and vegetables, storing and handling food safely, paying attention to portion sizes, choosing healthy snacks, and balancing food with physical activity.

Teaching Learners to Eat Healthy and be Physically Active

The *Stepping Up to a Healthy Lifestyle* materials developed by the WI Nutrition Education Network included 14 nutrition and physical activity lesson plans.

- In 2007, the materials were used in 27 WNEP counties for a total of 2,242 contacts.
- Following a lesson on choosing low calorie foods 48 learners were asked if they planned to choose lower calorie foods more often, 75% of said that they were. Following a lesson on the

recommended amount of physical activity 292 learners were asked if they planned to work toward being more active and 98% said that they were.

Teaching Learners to Manage their Food Dollars

Individuals who have adequate resources such as money for food are more likely to be food secure. WNEP provides education to individuals as one way to support them in acquiring and managing their resources for food.

- **Money for Food lessons were taught to individuals or groups, for 30,427 educational contacts during FY07.**

One of the primary resources used to teach about food resource management is the set of short interactive lessons called Money for Food. Twenty-five Wisconsin counties used the Money for Food lessons and evaluation tools during fiscal year 2007. Lesson topics included: shopping for food, determining resources for food, eating away from home on a budget, planning and tracking spending and living within a spending plan.

- **Participants learned new skills and about new resources that will help them feed their families**

After the lessons, over 81% of the learners reported that they had learned something or would do something differently. After a lesson on using food stamps and other programs to put together a food budget, 151 learners were asked if they had learned something that would make it easier for them to get enough food or money for food--85% of the respondents said "yes." After a lesson on community resources, when learners were asked if they learned about resources that a family could use that they had not known about before—80% of the respondents said "yes." After a practice activity on developing a family spending plan, 70% of the 303 learners who have never used one reported that they intended to try to use a spending plan for their families.

Teaching Learners to Handle Food Safely

Ten percent of the 317,997 teaching contacts during the year focused on areas of food safety: keeping hands and surfaces clean, handling and storing food safely, or safe food preservation.

- **Participants learned to chill foods quickly**

Educators taught youth, parents, adults without children, and older adults about chilling food properly. After the lessons 32% of 536 participants said they were going to start cooling hot leftovers quickly in shallow containers, and 27% said they were going to do this more often.

- **Participants learned to keep hands and kitchen food preparation surfaces clean**

Educators taught parents, adults without children, and older adults about keeping hands, kitchen surfaces and utensils clean. Following the lessons 14% of 829 participants said they were going to start washing hands properly and 30% said they were going to do this more often; 5% of 613 participants said they were going to start clean cutting boards and utensils properly and 21% said they were going to do this more often; 13% of 561 participants said they were going to start cleaning raw meat juice safely and 21% said they were going to do this more often.

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